EXPLORING THE MEDIA EFFECTS OF 3-D ONLINE IMMERSIVE WORLDS AND HOW THEY IMPACT BOTH VIRTUAL AND REAL SOCIAL CAPITAL

By

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To my family Jeff, John, Nick and Rachel, your love and support mean the world to me. With humble gratitude I also dedicate this work to my parents, to my wonderful committee, to my professors, and to the very dear people both real and virtual who have taught me more than I could have ever imagined.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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By

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As people seek to connect in new computer mediated ways, there has been great speculation as to the positive and negative societal impacts of this mechanism. This study explored the development of both real and virtual social capital as enhanced by the effects of presence, interactivity, and engagement experienced in the 3-D online immersive environment Second Life. The focus of the study was to examine the uses and gratifications of Second Life users; the presentation of self in the virtual world and how it influenced trust in virtual interaction; how trust differed in the virtual environment and if that difference also influenced the strength of ties created there; and the definition of virtual romantic relationships and their influence on the way individuals approach their real-life relationships and marriages.

The mixed method ethnography incorporated participant observation over a two-year period, group discussion content analysis, and 25 semi-structured interviews.

The results of this study reveal social, entertainment and escape motivations as well as gratification factors of information seeking, intellectual stimulation, communication and employment. The key themes aligned with social gratifications included social interaction in addition to the development of sexual and romantic

relationships. More than half of the study participants (60 percent) reported having been involved romantically with another virtual resident, four of whom (16 percent) reported their relationships were extramarital. The study participants consistently cited anonymity via a virtual persona and the sense that virtual actions did not share the same depth of potential consequence as they would in real life, as a source of confidence to explore their sense of "self" and others in a perceived "safe" environment. The participants reported a willingness to trust their virtual counterparts equally (40%) or greater (32%) in the virtual world as they did in their real lives. Further research is needed to better understand how the strength of trust and reciprocity in a 3-D online immersive environment will translate in the real world as individuals, institutions, and industry turn to these environments for work, education, entertainment, news, and social connection.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

> Despite the anti-technology attitudes which still persist (some, it should be added for very good reasons), the present generation of artists, filmmakers, and video-makers currently in school, and their instructors, who continue to ignore computer and video technology, will in the near future find that they have by-passed the primary medium, not only of their own fields, but of the entire culture as well.
>
> --Bill Viola*, "Will there be condominiums in data space?" (1982)*

We live in unprecedented and exponential times. Taking a glance through human evolution, massive leaps in cultural change have often been tied to the way humans could interact. The profound impact not only in the way individuals communicate, but in the way they live, work, learn, love and play resulting from the creation of the printing press, telephone, radio, and television have long been documented and heralded. Yet, some may argue that the launch of the Internet has impacted communication in far greater ways and in much shorter time than any manmade development before it.

As generations before us have experienced cultural revolutions and the adjustments that come with learning how to live in a "new world," today's technological revolution is changing our lives and, at the center of the firestorm is everything about the way we both send and receive information. We continue to witness the rapid attrition of traditional media including newspapers and radio stations, while we have also seen the emergence of new media technologies that have grown more rapidly than any medium before them. With these changes come curiosity, hope, and fear.

Since the advent of the Internet in 1970s and the subsequent launch of the World Wide Web in 1991 (www.w3.org, 2009), online media services have spread across the world in ways that few visionaries could have predicted. Since that time, as Negroponte (1995) wrote, "Computing is not about computers any more. It is about living" (p. 6).

Computers today have created a new media landscape that gives nearly every person the opportunity to be media producer, writer, artist, performer, communicator, observer, or active participant in their local, or global community.

Consider these statistics: In 2008, the fastest growing U.S. retail category was video games, consoles and accessories, growing nearly 30% in a year of extraordinary economic challenge. Likewise, online video viewing represented 12.5 percent of American's total time spent on the Internet -- up from 138 million in 2007 to 146 million unique visitors in 2008 (comScore, 2009). In less than five years since its creation, according to the most recent traffic data for YouTube, the world's most popular online video community, "People are watching hundreds of millions of videos a day on YouTube and uploading hundreds of thousands of videos daily. In fact, every minute, ten hours of video is uploaded to YouTube" (YouTube.com, 2009).

Social networking sites including one of the earliest versions, Friendster, and the more recently popular MySpace and Facebook exploded with activity as online communities formed from peer networks. In less than six years since its launch, the social networking site, Facebook, has grown to more than 250 million users worldwide, with nearly half of them logging in at least once per day (Facebook.com, 2009). And in a depressed global economy, the economic growth of the 3-D online virtual world Second Life, grew an astounding 94% in 2008 and an additional 65% in 2009 reporting an economy of $567 million in US dollars in 2009 (Linden Research, Inc., 2010).

Yet, as with any massive cultural change comes challenge and resistance. The process of acceptance and adoption of these new media may be best understood through the lens of Rogers' theory of diffusion of innovations (1983) or "the process by

which innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system" (Rogers 1983). He further refined the theory with the development of his proposed "adoption curve" (Rogers, 2003) which reflects how eagerly these innovations will be adopted by the public, how long such adoptions will take, and how hype will affect their adoption.

Given the explosive growth of these new media technologies, it might also be prudent to consider the role of hype in the adoption process. Gartner (Gartner, 2008) and Fenn & Raskino (2008) proposed the idea of the "hype cycle," a curve that tracks stages of user expectations over time. Gartner's original hype cycle provided “a snapshot of the position of technologies relative to a market, region, or industry, identifying which technologies are hyped, which are suffering the inevitable “trough of disillusionment,” and which are stable enough to allow for a reasonable understanding of when and how to use them appropriately” (Gartner, 2008).

While we’ve seen many new media technologies come and go in rapid fashion as diffusion of innovation would predict, one of the technologies that continues to garner attention, user growth and controversy is that of online virtual worlds. What may have originally been considered the fodder of science fiction until scientists began exploring it in research labs, through the Internet and personal computers virtual reality has become accessible to the general public through online 3D immersive environments. No longer are head mounted displays or data suits required for an individual to experience a virtual world.

The first effects of the medium appeared in education, business and social systems around the world, and, if online virtual worlds are still in what would be

considered the early adoption stage on Rogers' diffusion of innovation curve (Figure 1-1), greater effects are still to come. For example, three of the six areas anticipated to have the most significant impact on college and university campuses within the next five years are user-created content, social networking, and virtual worlds (2007 Horizon Report, New Media Consortium and EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative). Likewise, researchers predict that by 2011, 80 percent of active Internet users will have an "avatar," or virtual representation of themselves (Gartner, 2007).

Yet, in the past decade, the development and growth of social media including virtual worlds have been met with mixed reviews. It could be expected that media coverage would be positive due the pro-innovation bias (Rogers, 2008) that assumes "an innovation should be diffused and adopted by all members of a social system, that it should be diffused more rapidly, and that the innovation should be neither re-invented nor rejected" (Rogers, 1995, p. 101). That positive tone could also be the result of the place of that technology on what Gartner (2007) referred to as the "hype cycle of emerging technology" (Figure 1-2) which recognized the role of media hype in creating awareness and excitement around a proposed technology that would potentially warp the traditional adoption curve.

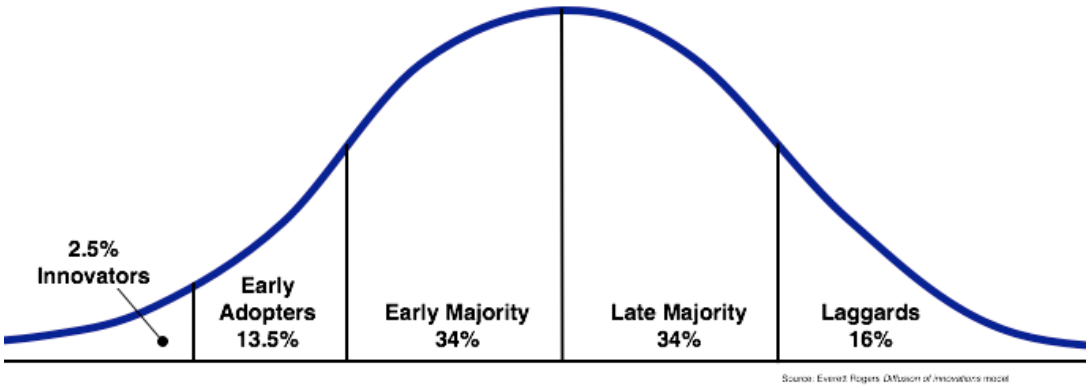

Figure 1-1. Rogers Diffusion of Innovation curve

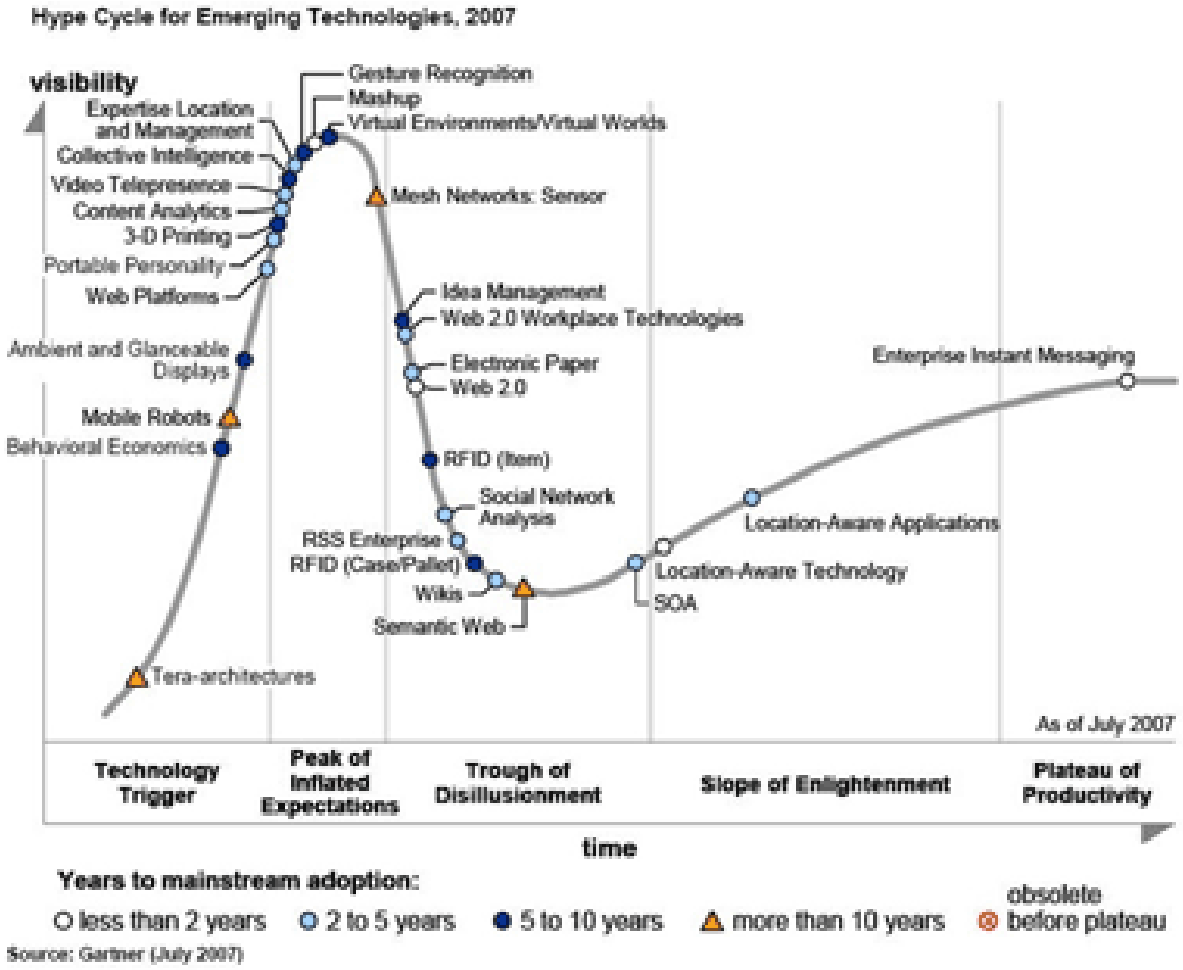

Figure 1-2. Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies, 2007

San Francisco-based Linden Labs, the creators of Second Life, also tracked its user growth and adoption as it relates to Gartner's hype cycle when the company charted its path on the curve for use in its 2009 annual conference keynote address (Figure 1-3).

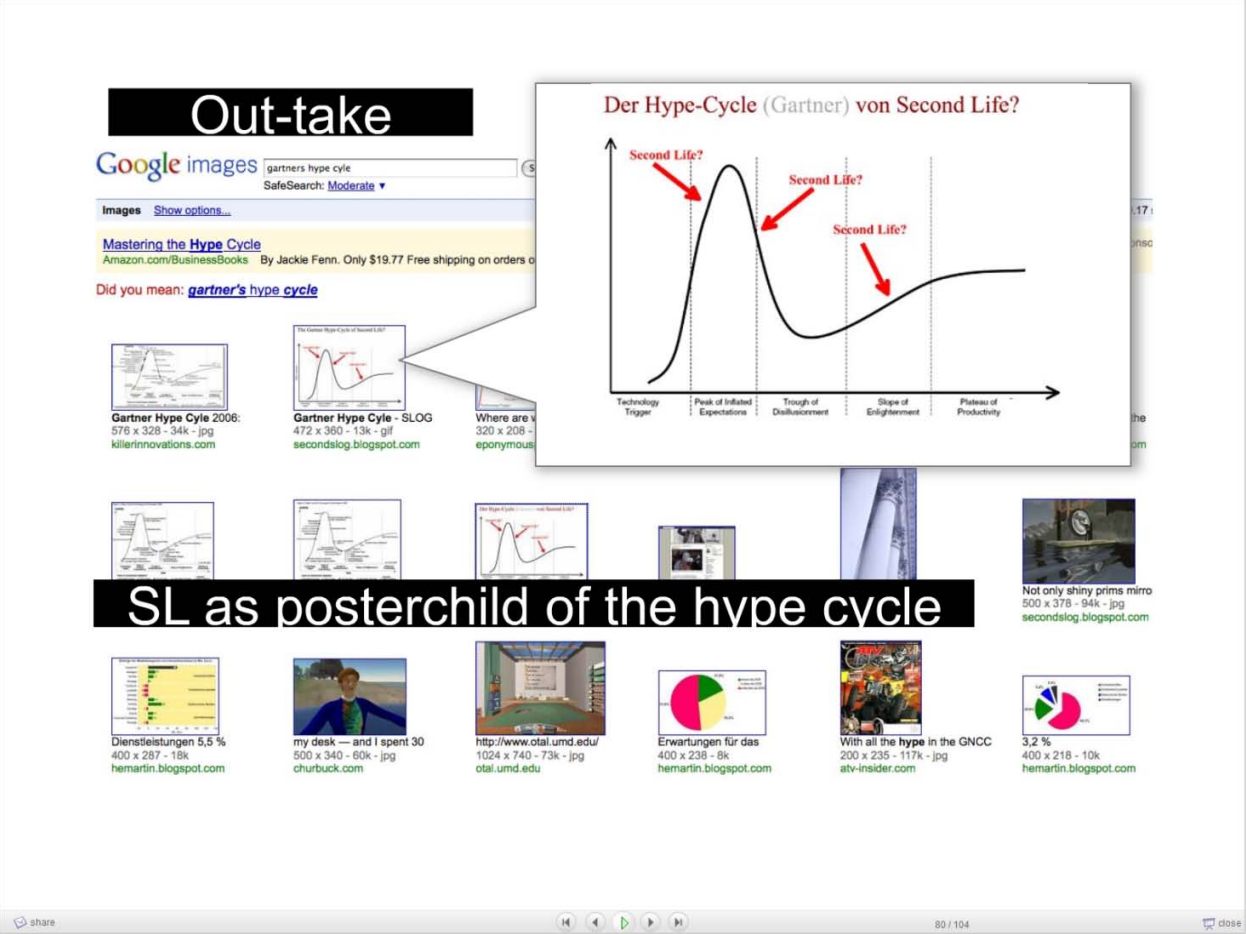

Figure 1-3. Hype Cycle for Second Life, 2009 (Source: SLCC keynote presentation (http://www.slideshare.net/guest8541d3b1/slcc-keynote-presentation))

However, along with the hype, the massive consumer growth, and the pro-innovation bias, anecdotal evidence suggests that the general public also fears negative consequences of these new technologies, and recent studies support those concerns. Numerous social science research studies have focused on the suggested negative consequences of Internet use specific to online social media including (but not limited to) issues as online predators, (APA, 2007, Wolak; Finkelhor, & Mitchell (2004), cyberbullying (Li, 2006; Williams & Guerra, 2007), Internet pornography (Cooper, Griffin-Shelley, Delmonico, & Mathy, 2001; Manning, 2006; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005),

infidelity (AAMFT, 2006; Aviram & Amichai-Hamburger, 2005) and addiction (Chou, Condron, & Belland, 2005).

Likewise, media technologies have been blamed for the decline in what is known as “social capital.” Coleman (1990) explained that social capital is defined by its function as a resource embodied in the relations among persons that facilitate action. Putnam (1993) further developed the concept to include “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for benefit” (p. 36). He defined social capital as the collective value of all "social networks" [who people know] and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other ["norms of reciprocity"] (Putnam, 2003). Putnam also reported that social capital is in decline, identifying the negative consequences of the isolating effects of television, and subsequently the Internet and new media, as the primary cause for this decline.

More recently, the Internet was also featured as a significant cause of isolation among families as the Annenberg Center for the Digital Future (2009) reported that although more than half (52%) of the Internet users surveyed said that the Internet was “important or very important in helping them maintain their *social* relationships” (Annenberg Digital Center, p. 7), when it came to their families, 44 percent reported that they were “sometimes or often ignored because another member of the household spends too much time online” (p. 7). The number of people who reported they spend less time with family members since connecting to the Internet at home, jumped from 11 percent in 2006, to 28 percent in 2008. The average number of hours families reported socializing with one another during those same years dropped from about 25 hours per month to approximately 18 hours.

Clearly, the social consequences of these new media technologies are profound. They are reshaping the way we define our social structures from our homes to our communities. As the technology advances and adoption increases, this area is rich with research potential. The Internet, especially the engaging and interactive potential of the 3-D online virtual world, may become a "community" of tomorrow -- one without racial, geographic, socioeconomic or geopolitical borders. People across the globe are already engaging in conversation, developing friendships, finding love, and building businesses with individuals of other cultures, races, languages, and religions in ways and numbers never possible before. Even so, as Ascott (1990) warned, "the very ease of transition from 'reality' to 'virtuality' will cause confusion in culture, in values, and in matters of personal identity" (Packer & Jordan, 2001).

Today, new, and what is often also referred to as "social" media because of its interactive features, is not only changing the way people receive, process, use and distribute information, it also has changed the way people seek entertainment and the way they interact both professionally and socially. Social media are providing a new forum of immersive, interactive entertainment, where the viewer is no longer simply a viewer, but an active participant. And perhaps, nowhere is that more "real" than in the 3-D virtual world.

To better understand the nature of communication in the virtual world, this study focused on key elements of social capital including trust and reciprocity as they evolve in social and romantic relationships. The study also specifically explored the influence of the 3-D immersive, interactive world in building, bridging, bonding, strengthening, or weakening that capital in both the real and virtual worlds simultaneously.

Research Questions

This research explored how digital social capital is created in both friendships and romantic relationships in a 3-D virtual environment. Specifically, this study sought to identify how the presentation of "self" and perceptions of others' influences trust. Additionally, this study explored if and how people are able to exchange resources and as a result are able to create ties that bond, bridge or maintain relationships, even in the form of a virtual marriage. Finally, this study probed those relationships and identified how they impacted real life relationships.

Scope and Timeline

Because the 3-D virtual world is creating a new form of community that has just begun to be empirically researched (and very little is yet understood about the behaviors in this culture), this research utilized qualitative methodology. Through ethnography incorporating participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this study explored the development of trust and reciprocity in the virtual realm and how that influenced the strength of ties formed in virtual relationships.

Avatar experience and patterns in relationships were observed over a prolonged period and through repetition. The ethnography was done by "living" in Second Life as a participant observer for at least one to two hours per day over a six month period beginning in the summer of 2009. To further explore the nature of these online relationships this study also incorporated participant observation in organized discussion groups about relationships in Second Life during the summer of 2009.

As the people experiencing and building the environment were observed, a number of themes emerged in relationship formation in this digital culture. These

themes were used to guide the semi-structured interviews that took place in Second Life during November and December of 2009.

Significance of the Study

As the numbers of people across the globe that are logging in to virtual worlds (or going online for a multitude of reasons) continue to increase, it will be increasingly important to understand how new digital media technologies can actually create and strengthen social capital from both a local and global perspective and on an interpersonal level. To that end, this research explored the influence of virtual presence on the strength of ties and development of social capital (including the development of trust) in the 3-D immersive worlds of the virtual realm, specifically using the virtual world *Second Life*. This research focused on social capital within friendships, romantic relationships and marriage as developed or dissolved in both participants' virtual and real lives simultaneously as a direct result of experience in this virtual world.

As researchers, we must consider these changing behaviors as they relate to both mass and interpersonal communication and identify the obstacles and opportunities in creating effective communication. Especially in the virtual realm, the increasing sense of being physically present is changing the way people interact and connect, yet little is understood about these impacts. Lee (2004) wrote, "one of the most important issues (regarding the study of presence) is the explanation of a mental mechanism that enables humans to feel presence when they use media or simulation technologies." As he asked, "What makes human minds not notice the virtuality of incoming stimuli?" (p.47).

Yet, these stimuli are influencing human relationships in significant ways. It is important to understand how virtual communities can build *digital* social capital, as well

as how the virtual relationships formed there impact this capital in the real world. Is there a correlation between positive virtual world social capital and real world social capital as it relates to personal relationships? And, is it possible to rebuild some of the eroded systems Putnam feared were in decline and create active, involved, and engaged audiences as they are able to connect through the emerging medium of 3-D virtual worlds? Or does this technology change the way we connect to the extent that it makes real life relationships more difficult? The implications extend well beyond personal relationships. As researchers at MIT and University College London explained in 2000, “Telecommunications companies would probably invest billions of dollars to know how to artificially effect this sense of (virtual) togetherness, and airline companies would probably do likewise to prevent this knowledge from being discovered” (Durlach and Slater, 2000).

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Theory

The study of media effects on culture is in its infancy as electronic media still represent a virtual nanosecond in world history. Even in its short life, almost as quickly as one information theory emerges, technological advances create new behaviors, rich in potential for societal change and the study of that change. For example, Wiener's study of cybernetic theory (1948), Shannon's information theory (1949), Lazarsfeld's two-step flow from media to opinion leaders (1944), Lewin's study of influence of social networks in the 1940s and '50s, and McLuhan's controversial yet visionary proclamation that "the media is the message," (1969) while relevant to media of their time and important to communications study today, may not be able to fully explain the influences of our current media culture on their own.

However, consider McLuhan's vision of nearly half a century ago as it may apply to digital media, when he wrote,

> After more than a century of electronic technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man – the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our sense and our nerves by the various media (1964).

Whether or not we credit or accuse the media of social change, indeed the very nature of organizations, families, and communities continue to evolve, especially given unprecedented globalization, immediate access to information, and mobility of our culture today. As such, the effects of new media may also be better understood and explored not only through Rogers (1995) theory of diffusion of innovation that reflects

the process of growth and adoption of a new technology, but also by taking a retrospective look at both Lazarsfeld's understanding of media effects and Lewin's social networks and cognitive theory as they are now be experienced in a mass media forum.

Cybernetics and Digital Culture

In von Neemann's "Review of Norbert Weiner's Cybernetics," he wrote, "The author is one of the protagonists of the proposition that science, as well as technology, will in the near and in the farther future increasingly turn from problems of intensity, substance, and energy, to problems of structures, organization, information, and control" (Rogers, 1994, p. 386). As we have transitioned from the industrial to the information age, we know that Weiner's vision of the future was quite accurate. Although the statistics vary, estimates of Internet usage show that the U.S. has now between 74 percent (http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm) and 79 percent (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009) saturation. Worldwide, although Asia has the highest number of total users with more than 657 million individuals online, it only represents 18% of the population. Europe and Australia also show strength in Internet consumption with approximately 50 and 60 percent penetration rates respectively (http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm). The most recent data on Internet usage in the U.S. found that 90 percent of Americans log in to send or read email, 88 percent use a search engine to find information, and 72 percent use the Internet "just for fun or to pass the time" (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009).

However, historians might argue that the Internet was not the beginning of this interactive information age. Consider the visionary work of Vennevar Bush, whose essay in the Atlantic Monthly (1945) has been attributed to the development of

hyperlinks, or Nam June Paik's notion that, "Through the connectivity of a 'cybernated society,'.... data flows through the wired network and across our screens. As the artwork incorporates the unending flow and restless nature of information itself, transcending geographic boundaries, it brings about a 'synthesis' of all cultures across borders." (Packer and Jordon, p. 42) The Internet and the emerging technologies of the net are providing the opportunities Paik envisioned to transcend geopolitical and cultural boundaries and create collaborative works like no time in our past. Music, art, literature and social dialog can be created, edited, shared, and distributed to even some of the most remote places on our planet now, not just through television and computers, but today, even through a device as small as a cell phone.

Although virtual worlds and information exchange have until recently primarily been in reference to text-based online communication, in the late 1980s, while working at the NASA-Ames Research center on the Virtual Environment Workstation (VIEW) project, engineer Scott Fisher developed one of the first multisensory interactive experiences using multiple cybernetic devices. "Fisher made a significant advance toward what he termed 'telepresence' – the projection of the self into a remote location or virtual world" (Packer and Jordan, 2001).

Today's version of an immersive virtual environment does not include any devices or attachments to stimulate the senses. Rather, high definition graphics and international connectivity have created 3-D immersive environments that now provide virtual "residence" to millions of people across the world, many of them in online games. In a survey of Americans playing online games, comScore (2009) found that online gaming had grown 27 percent during 2008 to 86 million visitors in December 2008,

while the total time spent playing online games jumped 42 percent. “Americans’ total share of Internet time spent playing online games grew from 3.7 percent in December 2007 to 4.9 percent in December 2008” (Comscore, 2009). One such game, and one the most popular is EverQuest. In “A first-hand account of market and society on the Cyberian frontier,” Castranova (2001) reported on his discoveries while spending six months in the 3-D immersive game EverQuest. He wrote:

> We must conclude that VWs offer something that is perhaps a bit more than a mere entertainment to which the players have become addicted. Rather they offer an alternative reality, a different country in which one can live most of one’s life if one so chooses. And it so happens that life in a VW is extremely attractive to many people. A competition has arisen between Earth and the virtual worlds, and for many, Earth is a lesser option.

This startling conclusion raises many questions about the nature of online 3-D immersive environments as they relate to the quality experience “in-world” and how that compares to the human experience in real life (RL) and how these “realities” influence the relationships we have at home and in our local and global communities.

Social Capital and Digital Social Capital

During the past two decades, theorists and researchers have spent tremendous effort studying the concept of social capital and its role in the ways communities and families interact (Coleman, 1988 & Putnam, 2000). Historically, social capital was perceived as a positive influence, providing individuals with the social resources that would enhance their life experience. Yet, scholars remain at odds on many aspects of social capital including whether it is seen as an independent or dependent variable, how to measure it, and how to apply it theoretically. It is a broad term encompassing the “norms and networks facilitating collective actions for mutual benefits” (Woolcock, 1998, p. 155). Given this expansive approach, social capital is often misunderstood and

misrepresented. It is little wonder then that there would be little agreement on the application of social capital to the digital world as well.

As previously explained, social capital, as defined by Coleman (1988), is a "resource embodied in the relations among persons and positions that facilitates action." Coleman identified three forms of social capital, including the obligations, expectations and trustworthiness of structures; information channels; and social norms. In other words, social capital is the strength of relationships within an individual's sphere of influence that provides order and opportunities that those without those relationships may not have. Although Coleman (1988) launched the discussion of social capital as an important element to the health of a civil society, as social capital theory further evolved researchers including Putnam used it as a construct to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of family and community connections and of civic engagement. Putnam also focused on trust and reciprocity within those relationships that gives social capital its strength and depth.

In the seminal work which dealt with the changing culture in the U.S., *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam identified the erosion of social capital in American communities as a threat to civic as well as personal health. Without social capital, individuals may experience increased emotional, physical, and/or financial burden that results from isolation and lack of shared resources. Social bonds are weakened, leading to additional changes in interpersonal behaviors. Putnam (1993) explained that the relationships between individuals and their networks form a complex web of interactions and communications. For example, Putnam identified bowling leagues, neighborhood

associations, and volunteering in nonprofit organizations or schools as social networks that formed social capital.

The role of social capital in shaping community cultures has been researched extensively. For example, studies on the impact of social capital on violence and homicide (Galea, Karpati & Kennedy, 2002), on educational achievement (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001), and on parental involvement and reduction in non-normative behavior (McNeal, 2001) have consistently shown that social capital plays a pivotal role in shaping families and communities.

Woolcock (1998) further explored the micro and macro levels of social capital concluding that "positive outcomes are attained to the extent that both embedded and autonomous social relations prevail at both levels" (p. 186). He explained that this can occur when people are willing and able to access positive social ties "(i) within their local communities; (ii) between local communities and groups within external and more extensive social connections to civil society; (iii) between civil society and macro-level institutions; and (iv) within corporate sector institutions" (p. 186).

Additional research from Helliwell and Putnam (2004) confirmed "that social capital is linked to subjective well-being through many independent channels and in several forms" (p. 1435). They identified marriage and family, friends and neighbors, workplace ties, individual and collective civic engagement, as well as trust and trustworthiness independently related to happiness and life satisfaction as well as health.

However, researchers have reported a decline in social capital in recent decades and see this decline as a threat to civil society. Putnam argued that changes in U.S. society have diminished social capital with the primary culprit being television. He

claimed that as social bonds are weakened, interpersonal behaviors change in negative ways. Today, new media are also changing the way people interact with one another and share their resources. As people "plug in" to new media, such as the Internet and new digital tools, many scholars argue that these technologies, in addition to television, are further diminishing social capital. Consider Negroponte's (1995) vision of *The Daily Me*, the result of electronic news and the subsequent ability of each individual to select the news and information they want to consume based on their own personal biases, or "personal filters." Does this selective consumption of news further exaggerate those biases and as a result build greater divisions within communities?

Contrarily, if in fact new media can provide the information and entertainment content of traditional media, but in a format that now allows the audience to participate in a fashion where they may never have had an opportunity or voice, might this not allow for a new form of social capital that could also invigorate the sense of belonging and civic engagement in ways never previously imagined? Or is face-to-face, personal contact essential to building social capital? Before answering these questions, it is necessary to identify and define the many variables that influence social capital.

At its core, social capital is fundamental to the success of any functional community whether that community is a work, residential, cultural, religious, educational, professional or familial community. Without trust and reciprocity – two of the most important elements of social capital -- organizational or interpersonal messages cannot be conveyed effectively and strong relationships cannot be established. Is *new media* technology eroding social capital as some scholars believe people are further isolating themselves in front of the computer monitor, iPod, or cell

phone? Instead, perhaps we are reaching a time when individuals will have the ability to be more "connected" than ever before *because* of these technologies.

The concept of digital social capital offers a contradictory approach to the claims that media are the primary cause of the isolation and alienation that has created the loss of social capital. This concept draws from the same principles of traditional social capital in that it represents the meaningful relationships and resources shared among individuals, built on norms of reciprocity, however, now through the connectivity and interactivity of digital media. Use of new interactive technologies can bridge, bond or maintain the ties among friends and family, civic and volunteer organizations and work communities, creating digital social capital. These technologies include email, blogs, wikis, social networking sites, text messaging (and additional cell phone technologies), online photo and video sharing, interactive massive multi-player online role playing games (MMORPGs) and networked virtual environments (NVEs).

According to the 2008 Annenberg School for Communication Center for the Digital Future's annual study of Internet trends and participation in online communities, 80 percent of Internet users older than 17 consider the Internet their most important source of information. As they reported, this was "over all other principal media, including television, radio, newspapers, and books" (Center for the Digital Future, 2008). Additionally, the Center reported that membership in online communities has more than doubled in just three years, with 55 percent reporting that "they feel as strongly about their online communities as they do about their real-world communities" (p. 2). Other researchers predict that within four years, 80 percent of active Internet users will participate in virtual worlds (Gartner, 2007).

Clearly these trends reflect a massive cultural shift in consumer and lifestyle behaviors. Still, Putnam (1993) posed the question, "Could new 'virtual communities' simply be replacing the old-fashioned physical communities in which our parents lived?" (p. 148). He found the options available on the Internet to represent "shortcuts" to civic expression that "would simply exacerbate the imbalance between talking and listening that is a prominent feature of contemporary civic engagement" (p. 174). Putnam also found that the trends in television viewing (which is clearly a one-to-many medium or considered "passive") were directly linked to civic disengagement and the national decline in social connectedness. He concluded that specifically young Americans were spending less time with friends and were not likely to get involved in community organizations or public affairs. Putnam wrote, "At the very least, television and its electronic cousins are willing accomplices in the civic mystery we have been unraveling, and more likely than not, they are the ringleaders" (p. 246).

Threats to community and civilized society have been observed and debated well before the twenty-first century (Tocqueville 1835, Tonnies 1887, Simmel 1903, Wirth 1938, Stein 1960). However, as Warren wrote about the "great change" in American communities in 1963, he described "the increasing orientation of local community units toward extra community systems of which they are a part, with a corresponding decline in community cohesion and autonomy" (p. 52). Warren wrote that this "great change" was a result of a series of changes that had taken place over a period of centuries and could be analyzed in terms of the division of labor; differentiation of interests and association; increasing systemic relationships to the larger society; bureaucratization and impersonalization; the transfer of functions to profit enterprise and government;

urbanization and suburbanization; and changing values (p. 53). Warren, like others before him, believed changes that emerged with the urbanization of our society created a shift from the horizontal ties of the preindustrial communities that shared a *Gemeinschaft* approach to community to a more *Gesellschaft*-like society (Tonnies, 1887 as cited in Warren) that focused more on the individual than the community. Assuming Warren was correct, this lack of control and impersonalization may have also been instrumental in the decline of civic participation and other measures of social capital.

Meyrowitz (1985) also found the electronic media culture, specifically television, was leading to social isolation. He wrote,

> (1) That social roles (i.e. social 'place') can be understood only in terms of social situations, which, until recently, have been tied to physical place, and (2) that the logic of situational behaviors has much to do with patterns of information flow, that is, much to do with the human senses and their technological extensions. Evolution in media, I have suggested, has changed the logic of the social order by restructuring the relationship between physical place and social place and by altering the ways in which we transmit and receive social information (p. 308).

Meyrowitz warned that massive media exposure to multiple cultures and "an overwhelming range of information from around the globe," (p. 318) would actually isolate viewers and erode their own sense of space and identity. She explained that the relationship between media and behaviors would destroy existing role structures. She wrote, 'Controlling the content of electronic media, for example, will not maintain old forms of social organization" (p. 319). Jenkins (2006) echoed her warning when he wrote, "that our ties to our culture's social institutions as well as geopolitical systems are weakening as "new forms of community are emerging" (p. 27).

Although there is no question that communities, cultures and governments continue to change over time, how those changes impact individuals and how those changes are perceived are always debated. For example, in response to the interest in the decline of social capital in the United States, Paxton (1999) used a multiple indicator assessment to analyze the indicators of social capital over a 20-year period and found a decline in trust in individuals, but not in institutions or associations.

Likewise, in just more than a decade since Putnam published *Bowling Alone* and Meyrowitz wrote *No Sense of Place*, the Internet has taken on many new dimensions that are dramatically changing the way people connect and participate in both online and offline worlds, often blending the two. Online communities also didn't exist when Warren (1963) wrote *Community in America*. Yet according to the Annual Report on American Journalism's *State of the Media 2006*, the Pew Internet and American Life Project and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reported that seven out of 10 adults (or approximately 137 million adults in the U.S.) were using the Internet in some way in 2005. And, in 2007, according to the Internet World Stats Usage and Population Statistics (www.internetworldstats.com), more than one billion people used the Internet each day, worldwide. At the end of 2006, Technorati was tracking more than 57 million blogs and reported that nearly three million blogs are created monthly, with 100,000 being created every day (Sifry, 2006). Additionally, according to ComScore (2007) almost a half a billion unique visitors used social networking sites worldwide during one month in 2007. As Donath and boyd explain, now "people are accustomed to thinking of the on-line world as a social space" (p. 71). Perhaps one of the most significant changes in the defining features of the media use is the shift of the

one-to-many or passive nature of the medium to this social environment that has been created as a result of interactivity.

Those social spaces come in many forms on the Internet today. People use the Internet to communicate with friends and family, to work, email, shop, blog, seek information, and for entertainment. Many Web sites offer forums or blogs to allow their visitors an opportunity to be part of "the conversation," whether it's in response to a news article or to share their opinion about a company, movie, book, politician or any topic one might imagine. In order to best understand the current nature of the Internet as a social space, this research will focus on virtual "communities" (including email, blogs, wikis, message boards, forums, networked virtual environments and Web sites), social networking sites and the issue of trust in a "world" where anonymity is often important.

Virtual Communities

New forms of community are emerging. However, there are many different perspectives on the term "community" when the Internet or Web are involved. Kavanaugh et al. (2005) posits that online communities are comprised of members of local non-profit, voluntary and government organizations that use the Internet to maintain group interaction. The term takes on broader meaning on Wikipedia.com, which claims "a virtual community, e-community or online community is a group of people that primarily interact via communication media such as letters, telephone, email or Usenet rather than face to face. If the mechanism is a computer network, it is called an online community" (Wikipedia.com). In his study of human communication and interaction on the Internet, Matusitz (2007) found "a virtual community, just like a community in a physical environment, looks like a gathering of people where there is

significant social interaction, as well as reciprocal and non-reciprocal communication" (p. 21).

Jenkins (2006) also described the online communities that were evolving as a result of converging media. For example, online communities inspired by the *Harry Potter* book series not only stimulated interest in the books, but motivated young people to read, write and organize to support their freedom of expression. Not unlike the "Trekkie" culture that emerged from the original *Star Trek* series, today's television programs, movies and books can create enhanced cultures around fictional stories that have captured their fans' imaginations. In entertainment, television programs are moving from the TV screen to the computer monitor as they invite viewers to become active participants in the programming. One contemporary example is *CSI: New York* which ended an episode directing viewers to go to the virtual reality world *Second Life* to "finish" the story (http://alpha.cbs.com/primetime/csi_ny/second_life/). In this forum, television is no longer a one-way communication medium. Viewers may have become interactive participants.

The blogosphere, or the networks of blogs now on the Internet, has also generated online communities that changed political history when they helped elevate American presidential candidate Howard Dean to the center of the race (albeit briefly) and collectively unraveled the deceptive documents of the presidential race that led to "Rathergate" (USA Today, 2004). Place blogs are another form of online communities that are emerging to create a sense of geographic community on the Web. The Center for Citizen Media explained, "A place blog is a site dedicated to a particular geographical community — a county, town, city, or neighborhood" (www.citmedia.org,

2006). *Placeblogger* further defined its role as the Web site states, “It’s about the lived experience of a place” (www.placeblogger.com). These blogs offer local residents an opportunity to get information about their community in a very cost and time-efficient fashion.

In a longitudinal study of a mature networked community, Kavanaugh et al. (2005) found such blogs (or sites) to be builders of social capital. They found “evidence in support of the argument that Internet use can strengthen social contact, community engagement and attachment” (p. 1). They also found social groups would significantly increase their types of active participation over time either by attending community functions or through leadership (p. 21) via active engagement of their online community. Their study also used measures of both local and non-local friends, family and co-workers. Additional studies (Horrigan, 2001, Wellman, et al. (2001) also found heavy Internet use was associated with increased involvement in voluntary and political organizations.

Communities built through converged technologies and those specific to geographic location are only two forms of online community. Online communities are also being developed in corporate and organizational cultures. Sunstein (2006) identified many examples of companies using online technology including blogs and wikis to develop new products as well as create new methods of conducting business. For example, Google and Microsoft have successfully harnessed the collective intelligence of prediction markets in shaping their products and services. Sunstein explained that many companies, such as Google, use incentives for employees who participate in forecasting schedules including product launches and office openings.

Wikis and other forms of open source software, such as programs found on the *Creative Commons* (creativecommons.org), offer additional examples of online communities where open collaboration is encouraged and supported.

Social capital is a relatively new theory that in less than a few decades has continued to generate great debate over the past few decades. According to many, social capital is the result of active engagement and authentic relationships within social networks that may include families, work, community and civic organizations and governments. Although Putnam emphasized the "local" requirement of these relationships as a function of the norms and reciprocity expected from face-to-face interaction, numerous studies have begun to make an argument for relationships that can be generated and maintained in the digital world.

Operational Properties

Ties that bind

Most literature on social capital examines the social ties generated as a result of the social relationships people share and resources embodied in those relationships. Putnam (1993) identified different forms of social capital, including bridging and bonding social capital. Bridging social capital is linked to "weak ties," or loose connections between individuals who may share information but do not share emotional support. Contrarily, bonding social capital is that which is typically found in friends and families, who share close emotional relationships. Ellison et al. (2007) introduced an additional form of social capital as it applies to the Internet in a concept of "maintained social capital," referring to "online network tools which enable individuals to keep in touch with a social network after physically disconnecting from it" (p. 1).

Measures of Social Capital

In addition to the ties formed by social capital, researchers have differed on measures of social capital. Putnam utilized the Roper Social and Political Trends and the DDB Needham Life Style surveys to measure indices of social capital and what he considered civic engagement. The components of his Social Capital Index included indicators such as:

Served on a committee for a local organization last year

“Most people can be trusted” vs. “You can’t be too careful”

Agree “most people are honest”

Voting turnout in presidential elections

Served as an officer of a local organization last year

501(c)(3) charitable organizations per 1,000 population

Attended club meetings: frequency last year

Civic and social organizations per 100,000 population

Attended public meeting on town or school affairs

Organizational memberships per capita

“I spend a lot of time visiting friends”

Entertained at home: frequency last year

Did volunteer work: frequency last year

Worked on community project: frequency last year

In 2003, Putnam updated his original list of “100 Things You Can Do to Build Social Capital” (Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America project at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard) to include 150 items including recommendations from “starting a monthly tea group” to “sit on your stoop.” Although

these aren't measures of social capital per se, Putnam suggests they are builders of social capital.

Resnick (2001) utilized a graph (Figure 2-1) to show the circular flow between social capital and the activities that produce it, indicating the role of social capital as both a cause and an effect. Like many studies of social capital, this model shows social capital as both a predictor and an outcome. In successful measurement of social capital, researchers must determine whether they are using social capital to predict behaviors/activities, or if behaviors/activities result in increasing or decreasing social capital.

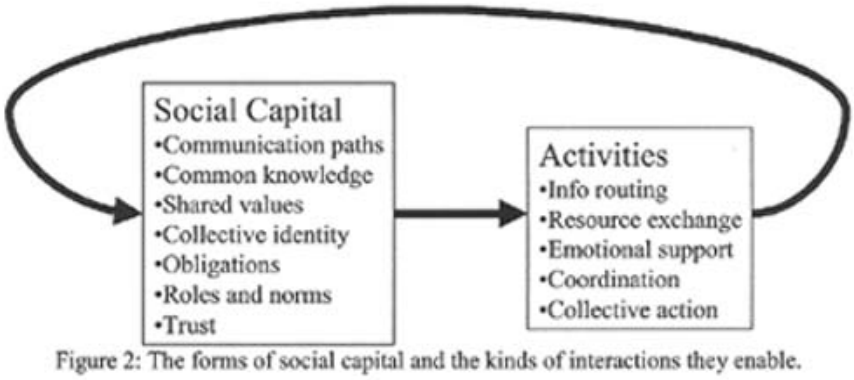

Figure 2: The forms of social capital and the kinds of interactions they enable.

Figure 2-1. Forms of social capital and interactivity they enable.

Narayan & Cassidy (2001) further developed the dimensions of social capital to reflect the following (See Figure 2-2):

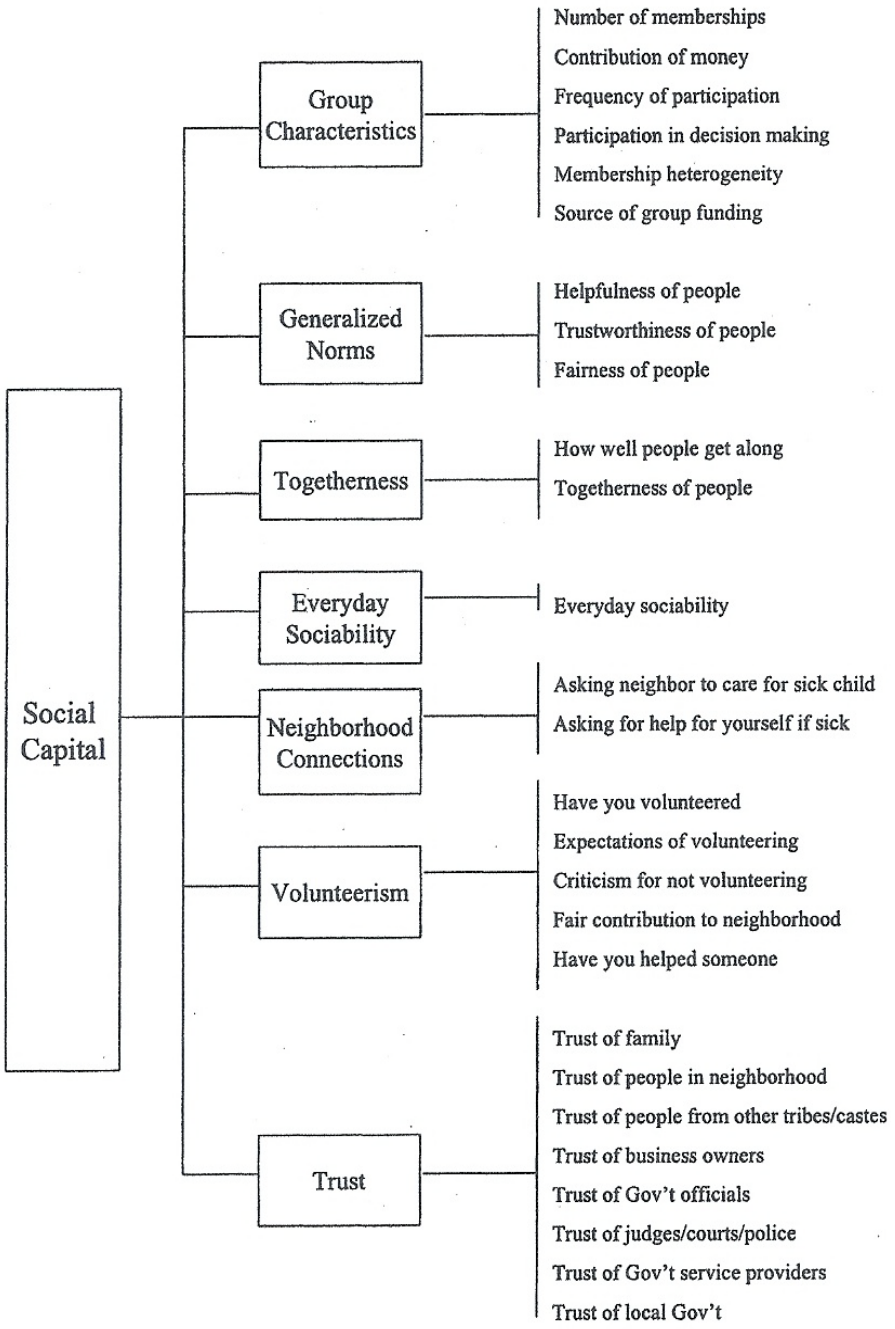

Figure 2-2. Redefined measures of social capital. Source: Narayan & Cassidy, 2001, (p.67)

To date, social capital has been measured by dimensions that assumed face-to-face contact was central to the creation and maintenance of civil society and civic

engagement. In the 1980s and 90s, the decline of social capital was debated as a function of urbanization as well as the advent of electronic media, specifically television. However, as digital tools, including the many social functions of the Internet, have continued to evolve and provide more open and interactive channels of communication both from a local and global perspective, the argument for improved social capital via digital technology has become stronger.

Summarizing the many dimensions and/or components of social capital found in previous literature, several common threads re-emerge in defining the concept which must remain central to any form of digital social capital as well. Digital social capital can occur, first, because the ties that connect individuals with their social systems are fundamental to the development of social capital. Second, social capital can be found in measures of connectedness between friends and family (which include communities of personal social interests), civic community and work community. These communities are not only being formed, but strengthened, online. And finally, the other essential element to the creation of social capital is trust and reciprocity. Without question, if an individual cannot trust their source of love, affection, attention, information (or have confidence that they're being treated fairly whether in a personal, professional, or political transaction) they cannot build social capital within that relationship. These relationships exist between individuals, social groups, organizations, corporations, or governments.

Paxton (1999) found that individuals were losing trust in individuals, but not in institutions. Now more than a decade later, if the data were collected again, the same study may reveal less confidence in institutions today. It was such a lack of confidence

that ultimately led to the rise of many digital technologies and communities, such as blogs and wikis. Not unlike the “real” world, the digital world has both strength and weaknesses in levels of trust. Although blogs arose from political and social motivations that forced a deeper discussion of issues, anyone can create a blog. Because they are often used for personal opinion or entertainment purposes without adequate research basis or appropriate attribution, they often do not enjoy high levels of trust. However, open source software programs such as wikis are built on the premise of trust and reciprocity and the unprecedented success of Wikipedia would not be possible without both trust and reciprocity.

Social capital cannot exist without positive and reciprocal connections between an individual and any number of social networks including friends, family, social, civic, religious, volunteer or professional organizations. However, as technology has permitted individuals to connect to their networks through highly interactive and mobile tools using greatly improved multimedia methods, “connecting” is now accessible to almost anyone, almost anywhere. This does not disavow the notion of a “digital divide” that might in fact not allow remote or financially disadvantaged individuals to participate. However, these individuals are also often lacking other simple resources required to develop social capital (including transportation or the economic resources to participate in community organizations) especially when their communities lack places or programs that support civic organizations or services.

Digital social capital draws from the same principles of traditional social capital in that it represents the meaningful relationships and resources shared among individuals, built on norms of reciprocity, through the connectivity and interactivity of digital media.

Digital social capital can bridge, bond, or maintain the ties among friends and family, civic and volunteer organizations, and work communities, utilizing many existing digital technologies. These technologies include email, blogs, wikis, social networking sites, text messaging (and additional cell phone technologies), online photo and video sharing, interactive multi-player online games, and networked virtual environments. The following model proposes a visual concept of social capital that includes bridging, bonding and maintaining ties to social networks within the realms of friends and family, community, and work while fostering trust and reciprocity in a digital format:
(See Figure 2-3)

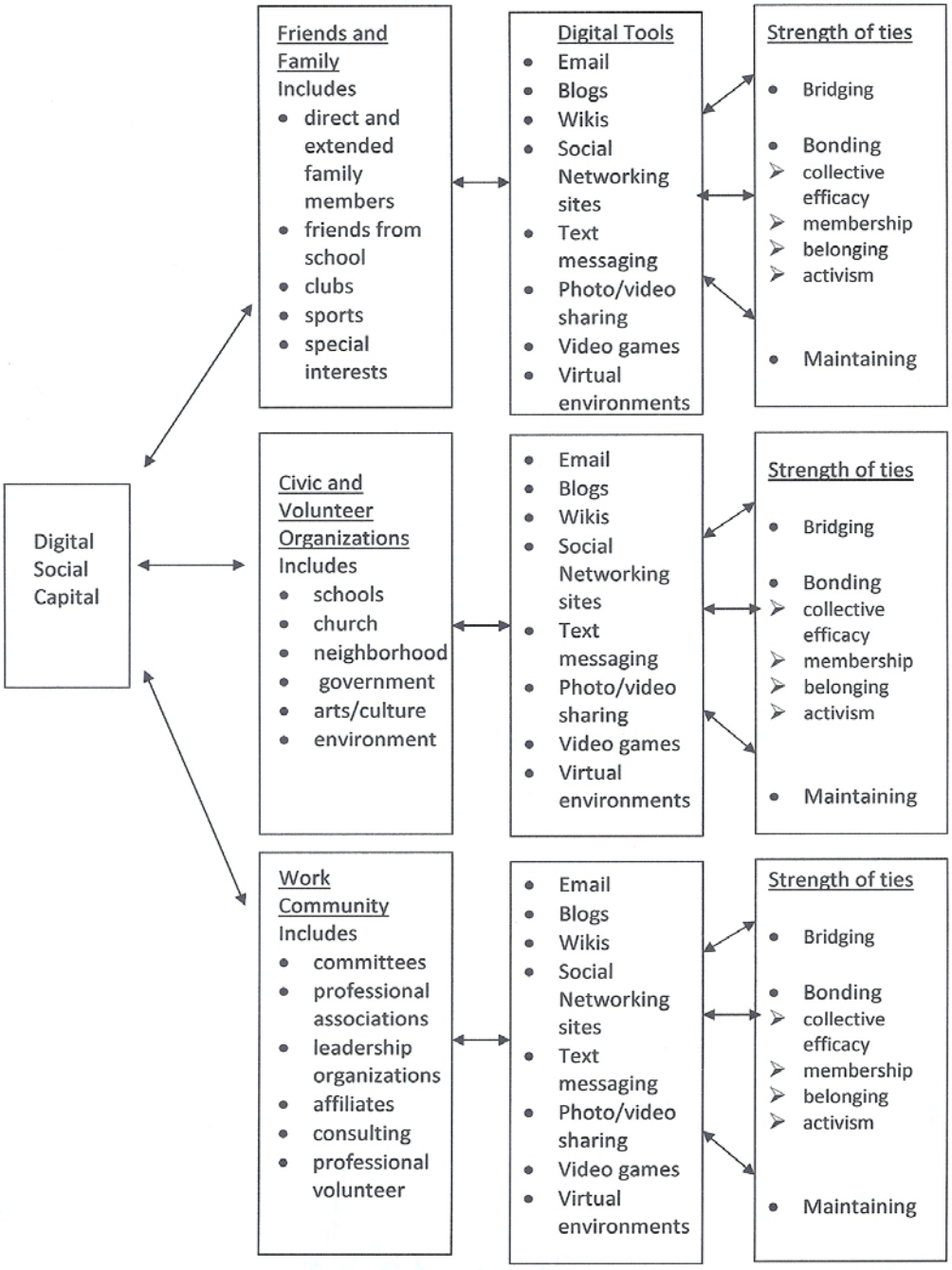

Figure 2-3. Digital social capital visual conceptualization

Digital Measures of Social Capital

Applying fundamental constructs of Putnam's measures of social capital, Kavanugh et al (2005), then applied the theory and its measures to online communities. They measured variables of social capital including 1) community involvement and attachment; 2) interests and activities; 3) Internet use and experience; 4) social circles; 5) significant life changes; 6) psychological attributes; and 7) demographics. Intervening variables included collective efficacy, membership, belonging, and activism. Internet use variables included frequency scales of Internet use for civic, political, health, commerce, social, and educational/professional purposes. Their Social Internet Use constructs resulted from responses to use of the Internet "to communicate with friends (local, non-local), family (local, non-local), co-workers (about non-work issues), and to meet new people" (p.10).

The validity of these measures of digital social capital among virtual social networks and the resulting reports of strength or weakness of their ties to those communities have yet to be tested as these networked communities are still so new. However, as these technologies have reached mainstream adoption and individuals spend more "residing" in these communities, their social strengths and weaknesses should be more easily observed.

Networked Virtual Environments (NVEs) – *Second Life*

The virtual world is often thought of as the World Wide Web, the Internet and as cyberspace. It is not just the virtual environment in which people operate, but it is a complex system in which they increasingly work, play and interact. Novak (Packer and Jordan, 2001) defined cyberspace as:

> Cyberspace is a completely spatialized visualization of all information in global information processing systems, along pathways provided by present and future communications networks, enabling full copresence and interaction of multiple users, allowing input and output form and to the full human sensorium, permitting simulations of real and virtual realities, remote data collection and control through telepresence, and total integration and intercommunication with a full range of intelligent products and environments in real space.

He adds, “Cyberspace is a habitat for the imagination – the place where conscious dreaming meets subconscious dreaming, a landscape for rational magic, of mystical reason, the locus and triumph of poetry over poverty, of “it-can-be-so” over “it-should-be so” (p. 254). Barrett (1989) and Druckery (1996) define virtual community as an unlimited, self-organized global network comprised of “wired identity.” The virtual world is that place we enter when we turn on the computer and go online, whether for seeking information, shopping, communicating or gathering for work or for play. Just as in the physical world we visit libraries, stores, schools, clubs, and offices. The motivations are the same -- it is simply the path that is different.

Although most prior research on virtual worlds represent online destinations such as forums, social networking sites, and online shopping communities, for the sake of this research, the virtual world will be represented in the context of an online 3-D graphical environment. 3-D virtual worlds, including Massively Multi-player Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) such as *Second Life*, *Sims* and *World of Warcraft*, are online communities where multiple users can interact online (as avatars) simultaneously. Castronova (2001) identified the defining features of virtual worlds as interactivity, which provides simultaneous remote access to one shared environment by a large number of people; physicality, which allows people to access a program that “simulates a first-person physical environment on their computer screen (p. 6),” central

to presence; and persistence, or the ability for the program to run whether in use or not while storing data regarding the individuals and their online objects. More recently Bell (2008) further refined the definition of virtual worlds as a synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers. These environments offer common time communication in a sense of real space that continues to exist and function whether the participant is online or not, much like the real world. The networks of people, the networks of computers, and graphic representations of the individual, or the avatar, are also key.

One of the most popular virtual worlds is *Second Life* which made its debut in 2003. In its first six years, participation in *Second Life* grew to approach 15 million "residents" worldwide. Its economy continued to build with businesses and individuals offering goods and services totaling more than $360 million in USD transacted in 2008 (http://secondlife.com/whatis/economy_stats.php, June, 2009). Additionally, in May, 2009, Second Life creators Linden Lab reported that 700,000 unique users consumed more than a billion minutes of voice services each month (http://lindenlab.com/pressroom/releases/19_05_09).

Media Effects in 3-D Environments: Presence, Immersion, and Interactivity

What distinguishes 3-D online environments from any previous medium are the elements of presence, immersion, and interactivity. These concepts of interactivity and presence are paramount to the powerful effects of new media.

One of the earliest pioneers of virtual reality was Morton Heilig, a Hollywood cinematographer who in the 1960s created the Telesphere Mask and the nickelodeon-style arcade machines he called Sensoramas. These machines required the viewer look through a binocular viewing optics system to see a simulated motorcycle ride through

New York City while hearing corresponding sounds of the city. Additionally, the seats would vibrate and a built-in fan would blow on the user to simulate wind as well as blow a chemical smell in the person's face, thus successfully incorporating the senses of sight, sound, touch, and smell. Heilig believed "if an artist controlled the multisensory stimulation of the audience, he could provide them with the illusion and sensation of first-person experience, of actually 'being there'" (Packer & Jordon, 2001).

In 1966 Ivan Sutherland took another leap into the development of virtual presence with the creation of the head-mounted display to immerse the user into a simulated 3-D environment. Sutherland visualized the potential of computer graphics when he explained, "By working with such displays of mathematical phenomena we can learn to know them as well as we know our own natural world. Such knowledge is the major promise of computer displays" (p. 236). The evolution of virtual presence was further advanced with Scott Fisher's work in the 1980s at NASA-Ames Research Center and the invention of "the 'dataglove' – a wired glove worn by the user that makes it possible to grasp virtual objects in cyberspace." Fisher was extending "Heilig's concept of experience theater" (p. 238) and telepresence by creating multisensory interaction that made the illusion of virtual reality more powerful.

Presence has been defined in many ways. Heeter (1992) posited that presence could be manifested in either a personal, social, and environmental sense. Personal presence is experienced when a person believes that they are actually inside a virtual or remote environment. Social presence is the belief that a person is experiencing and interacting with other beings. Environmental presence represents how effectively the environment itself is able to acknowledge and interact with the user in the environment.

Furthermore, Minsky (1980) defined the term “telepresence” as the phenomenon that a human develops the sense of being physically present at a remote location through interaction with the medium based on their actions and the perceptual feedback resulting from those actions. It’s this sense of presence that has dramatically influenced the growth of 3-D virtual environments. Facilitated by social interactions and enhanced with a 3-D graphical interface, virtual world environments have become a tool for business, education, and research.

Key to the interest in virtual environments is this increasing sense of emmersive presence that has researchers, educators, and business entrepreneurs turning to this technology for teaching, training, and developing products and ideas. In a recent survey of educators in Second Life, the New Media Consortium (2009) reported “Educators are moving from exploration to use of Second Life for teaching and learning.” Most recently they found that 71 percent of respondents reported being involved in educational activities in Second Life, up from 54 percent the previous year; nearly 30 percent now hold virtual office hours in Second Life; and 12 percent had taught a class completely in Second Life (up from 8 percent the year prior). Bowers, Davis and Neely (2009) found a dominant frame of pedagogical exploration among higher educators using Second Life frequently citing presence, interactivity and engagement as key motivations.

Likewise, businesses are turning to the virtual world to host meetings and conferences. Another powerful testimony to the changing business landscape in virtual worlds was in the report from International Business Machines (IBM) in late 2008. IBM

hosted its annual meeting in a secure Second Life environment. The website case study reported:

> "IBM estimates the ROI for the Virtual World Conference was roughly $320,000 and that the Annual Meeting was executed beautifully at one-fifth the cost of a real world event. Many IBM staff were converted into virtual world advocates, paving the way for many future internal conferences and events to be held within the space."

Even with the growth in usage of virtual worlds in education and business, the study of process and function in virtual environments is very limited in this nacent field. Recent research has explored the correlation between a number of identified parameters including presence and immersion and emotion (Banos, Botella, Liano, Buerrer, Rey, & Alcaniz, 2004); augmented versus virtual environments and visual perception of body motion (Tang, Biocca & Lim, 2005); and aesthetic experience (Eber, Betz & Little, 2007) in virtual environments.

In his explication of presence, Lee (2004) further defined presence as "a psychological state in which virtual objects are experienced as actual objects in either sensory or nonsensory ways" (p. 27) and may include physical, social, and self presence. Physical presence refers to the physical objects or environments that are typically experienced through visual and audio stimuli. Social presence represents the social interactions that humans exchange through media and technology. Lee posits "Just as people pay special attention to other humans more than any other physical objects, technology users pay great attention to technology-generated stimuli manifesting humanness in both physical – and psychological (e.g. personality, reciprocity, interactivity, social roles, understanding language, etc.) ways" (p. 39). Virtual presence as it relates to self presence is defined as either a "para-authentic

virtual representation of the technology user," or what might be considered an alter-self that is unique to the virtual environment.

Just as Lee differentiated presence as it relates to media and technology, the role of interactivity also requires distinction. Interactivity has been used as both dependent and independent variables in scholarly research across many disciplines including communication, psychology, sociology, and computer science. And as there are content and process gratifications, likewise, interactivity has been measured as both human and media interactivity as well as 'content' and 'interpersonal' interactivity (Massey and Levy, 1999). To best understand the concept of interactivity as it relates to 3-D immersive virtual worlds, Kiousis' (2004) definition best represents the measure as it relates to so-called "new media." In his explication of interactivity, Kiousis explained, "interactivity can be defined as the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many to-many) both synchronously and asynchronously and participate in reciprocal message exchanges (third-order dependency)" (p. 379). He also identified the importance of the technology user's ability to perceive this communication as a "simulation of interpersonal communication."

Kiousis recommends three sets of operational measures of interactivity including the medium's structure which features speed, range of the system and technological complexity. The second set of measures is contextual including third-order dependency and social presence as they are found in the media environment. The final set of measures represent the "perceived levels of interactivity" or "how well the communication experience simulated interpersonal communication" (p. 376). Each of

these measures help distinguish between interactivity as it occurs in interpersonal communication and in computer mediated communication. Still, when interactivity measures are highest, the experience also comes closest to that of a face-to-face exchange. In fact, Curtis (1990) saw interactivity as a form of social behavior which reflected behavior in real life.

The simulation of interpersonal communication is greatly enhanced in the 3-D virtual world. Yee, et al. (2007) studied social norms and behaviors including eye gaze and interpersonal distance (IPD) among avatars in Second Life and found that "established findings of IPD and eye gaze transfer into virtual environments – as predicted by Equilibrium Theory" (p. 115). In other words, the social norms and interactions that occur in interpersonal communication in RL also apply to social behavior and communication in the virtual world.

Online Relationships - Why and How They Form

Although research in these 3-D immersive virtual worlds is at a relatively early stage, there are parallels between the online virtual world and behaviors in other Internet communication. For example, in studying online forums Bargh and McKenna (2004) found that the "relative anonymity aspect encourages self-expression, and the relative absence of physical and nonverbal interaction cues (e.g. attractiveness) facilitates the formation of relationships on other, deeper bases such as shared values and beliefs" (p. 586). Their extensive literature review also revealed evidence that communicating via the Internet was instrumental not only in maintaining close ties with friends and families, but in forming new close and meaningful relationships in a relatively safe environment (p. 582). Bargh, et al. (2002) also found that individuals had the tendency to project ideal qualities on the people they "meet" on the Internet, and the

lack of traditional gating features that may otherwise prohibit development of relationships enhances the opportunity to create closer relationships (p. 45).

In the 3-D immersive virtual world, these connections also appear to be occurring in much greater speed and intensity. Walther (1996) identified this trend in the development of the Hyperpersonal Model of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). Walther found that because users and present themselves as their "best" selves and the reduced number of social cues in CMC such as body language and eye contact can lead to an idealized perception by the perceiver. He also found that the flow of communication could be more friendly and cordial than face-to-face communications because users typically are required to take more time to process their thoughts to the written word.

Likewise the element of anonymity provides individuals the opportunity to explore their concept of self and express their true feelings in the "relatively safe environment" Bargh discussed. The 3-D environment is enhanced by the powerful sense of presence, combined with the ability to create a visual identity and experience levels of engagement and interactivity previously not possible in traditional Internet communications.

Having spent the past two years immersed in *Second Life*, I have become deeply imbedded in numerous social communities including those formed by common academic interests such as an evolutionary psychology discussion group, the music communities which are comprised primarily of the fans of *Second Life* performers, and resident communities similar to neighborhood communities in the real world. Having developed friendship bonds over time (but with full disclosure that I am in-world as a

researcher) several virtual residents have voluntarily and openly shared extraordinary stories of the relationships they formed there including those with professional colleagues, with friends created through common interests, and love relationships. They also revealed how those relationships are influencing their real lives, sometimes in profoundly positive ways, sometimes in devastating ways.

Similarly, in a recent ethnography of the virtual world, *Cybercity*, Carter (2008) explored the culture of one online virtual community (Cybercity) and the nature of human relationships within that culture. Carter concluded that online relationships are evidence that social relationships are in a state of transformation as they are no longer "anchored by the everyday social and cultural construction of gender, age or race" (p. 164). She also determined that the basic tenets of friendship, including establishment of trust, remain intact whether operating in the virtual or real world.

People frequently turn to media for escape and romance, whether in a book, at a play, on the big screen, on television or in music where the common theme of falling in love and "living happily ever after" is often dominant. Likewise, the phenomenon of parasocial interaction, a defined by Horton and Wohl (1956) identified the bond that is formed between a real person and a fictional or celebrity character such as those individuals who "fall in love" with a character in a film or television program. Such a relationships Horton and Wohl also referred to as "intimacy at a distance." From Shakespeare's stage, to the silver screen and TV screen, now romance might be found on the monitor on the desktop; and the viewer is not simply watching, but participating. This is not the medium described in Shannon's (1949) linear communication theory where the message originates from one source and then ends with the receiver.

Rather, new media represents the more circular model of Weiner's cybernetic theory (1948) with the medium at the center of the circle.

The evolution from television to Internet consumption can be traced through the theoretical lens of uses and gratifications. One study of "Internet uses and gratifications found that the motivations of Internet use and television viewing likelihood were identical, even though the motivations for seeking specific types of Internet or TV content might diverge" (Song, Larose, Eastin, & Lin, 2004). While traditional media has often left romance to the imagination, new media takes the story one step further, allowing the viewer the opportunity to take part in the drama via interactivity. Prior research has explored the link between media uses and gratification and Internet use, confirming social interaction as a strong usage motivation.

Charney and Greenberg (2002) described eight gratification factors for Internet use including keeping informed, diversion and entertainment, peer identity, good feelings, communication, sights and sounds, career and 'coolness.' Specific to socialization, multiple studies have found process-oriented gratifications including Social and Entertainment gratifications (Stafford and Stafford, 2001), Escapism and Socialization (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 2001), and Companionship, Interpersonal Communication, Escape, and Interaction (Lin, 2000 and 2001). In their study of Internet addiction, Song, Larose, Eastin and Lin (2004) explored interactivity as a process gratification when they explained:

> "the expectation of encountering exciting and relaxing diversions on the Internet could attract users to the Internet who normally seek these gratifications through other media. The possibility of developing a romantic relationship online or finding more interesting people there than in real life could lead to less contact with real world associates. The ability of the Internet to satisfy diverse needs normally associated with both mass

> communication and interpersonal channels arguably makes it a spawning ground for excessive use" (p. 386).

This raises an interesting paradox of interactivity as a process gratification. On one hand, people seek and discover stimulating or romantic social interaction and in finding it they also isolate themselves socially. It's important to look at sociological trends in relationship formation to better understand this conflict. In a study of online dating, Brym and Lenton (2001) identified four social trends that strongly influenced the growth of online dating in Canada including a growing number of singles; growing pressures of career that limit opportunities for social activities where singles may meet; increased mobility that decreases opportunities to building and sustain intimate relationships; and a growing sensitivity of sexual harassment in the workplace reducing the number of romantic relationships that may have traditionally developed there.

As a new "meeting place," the Internet has had a powerful influence on relationship formation. In fact, according to an eHarmony poll conducted by Harris International (2008), more than 2.5 percent of new marriages in 2007 originated from eHarmony alone. Some estimates suggest that more than 30 percent of new marriages in the U.S. last year originated online (Qualman, 2009). It's also important to distinguish research specific to online dating sites as these services and the individuals who use them, are actively seeking romantic partners. As such they are also typically in search of someone who lives close enough to meet face-to-face. However, as Barraket and Henry-Waring (2008) explained, "One of the most commonly cited culturally transformative possibilities of online technologies is their capacity to overcome the tyranny of distance, time and space to allow for the establishment of new networks and patterns of interactivity." No longer are the choices of romantic partners limited to the

"pool of eligibles" in the community in which one lives. They added, "More significantly – the dominant theoretical frameworks for understanding intimacy in the global era are predicated on a shared belief that we exist in a period of de-traditionalization, where socio-cultural traditions are being abandoned or reconfigured" (p. 161).

In a separate study of intimacy in relationships, Bawin-Legros (2004) wrote, "the influence of traditional sources of authority and of social bounds has increasingly receded in favour of an endless and obsessive preoccupation with personal identity" (p. 241). In a survey of 4500 households, Bawin-Legros found that although couples reported that they still aspire to fidelity, honesty and durable bonds, they also have a commitment to autonomy that is in conflict with their concept of idealized love. As such, these couples also reported that they don't necessarily believe in the ideal of "till death do us part," but that they believe their relationships should remain intact "for as long as love lasts" (p. 246). As Bawin-Legros concluded, this ideal makes love relationships much more fragile. These cultural changes in the ideal of intimacy and relationship formation may have dramatic impacts on the traditional institutions of marriage and family.

Additionally, how will intimate relationships formed online impact real life relationships and the very definition of love and commitment? Intimate relationships that form in online environments are not specifically dating sites. These relationships are being developed in social networking sites, forums, chat-rooms, MMORPGs, as well as online dating services. And the strength of ties built online appear to be powerful. In a separate study of online relationships, Yee (2006) found that of almost 3,500 adults who participate in Massively Multi-User Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), more

than 20% of males and more than 30% of female players, “had told personal issues or secrets to their… [online] friends which they had never told their real-life friends” (p. 320). Almost 40% of men and more than 50% of women surveyed also said that “their…[virtual] friends were comparable or better than their real-life friends” (p. 321).

Even though interactive computer/electronic artist and theorist Roy Ascott's "Is there love in the telematic embrace?" (1990), was written nearly 20 years ago, before most the digital tools that we are using today were created, he captured the essence of Internet romantic connections. Ascott wrote, "The adoption of the headset, DataGlove, or other data wear can make the personal connection to cybersapce -- socialization in hyper-reality -- wherein interaction with others will undoubtedly be experienced as "real," and the feelings and perceptions so generated will also be "real" (p. 314). Of course we're not using headsets and datagloves, nor do we need them to enter the immersive 3-D virtual world today. The images alone, as currently available are already creating "real" emotions for many individuals from which relationships form.

However, there is also evidence that online connections are not so ideal and in fact, potentially destructive. Nie (2002) and Kraut, et al. (1998) warned that Internet use was associated with decline in time spent with family members and in the size of one’s physical social circle, increasing the potential for depression and loneliness. Numerous social science research studies also have focused on many negative consequences of Internet use including (but not limited to) such issues as predators, cyber bullying, pornography, infidelity, addiction and a conflicted presentation of self.

As dating rituals have long included “putting your best foot forward” in creating what potential suitors hope will be attractive to their dating counterpart, conflicted

presentation of self can be especially complicated when interacting in any romantic relationship. In the virtual realm this is further exacerbated as individuals can create whatever image they believe is going to give them the greatest success. According to a recent survey of about 350 members of Match.com, the way individuals present themselves and how they disclose personal information in online dating sites depends on what they want out of the relationship goals (Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006). Gibbs, et al found that those individuals "with long-term goals of establishing [face-to-face] relationships – are more honest, disclose more personal information, and make more conscious and intentional disclosures to others online" (p. 169).

The presentation of self is also potentially influenced in the 3-D virtual environment simply by the fact that avatars (by default) are typically all young, fit and beautiful, or perhaps not even in human form and as such, not necessarily a reflection of reality. In fact, Neustaedter and Fedorovskay (2009) found that Second Life users created their virtual identity based on four different user motivations including "Realists, Ideals, Fantasies, and Roleplayers – where each presents unique challenges for avatar design. Realists are the users who consider their virtual selves to be an extension of their RL" (p. 187). "Ideals" are those who "feel their RL appearance is less than ideal and aim to overcome perceived inadequacies" (p. 188) such as looking similar to their real selves but thinner. Their personalities are the same in both worlds. "Fantasies" are the people who keep RL and SL completely separate and create avatars that appear nothing like themselves. These people typically maintain a constant look to in order to maintain the fantasy. "This continuity allows them to establish and maintain long term relationships (p. 188). The "Roleplayers" are very similar to "Fantasies" in that they create avatars

that do not related to their RL identity, however, these people also create a new identity for each new fantasy experience and often have several avatars “to fulfill different identity needs” (p. 188).

Neustaedter and Fedorovskay found, “identity emerges and evolves through… online interactions with others” (p. 183). Pierre Levy (1999) also described virtual identity as a process:

> In scholastic philosophy the virtual is that which has potential rather than actual existence. The virtual tends toward actualization, without undergoing any form of effective or formal concretization. The tree is virtually present in the seed. Strictly speaking, the virtual should not be compared with the real but the actual, for virtuality and actuality are merely two different ways of being (p. 35).

As studies continue to better understand virtual identities, research continues to show that these 3-D environments create opportunities for individuals to explore different facets of their personalities and to experience and express themselves in ways that RL may not allow or accept. It is considered a “safe” environment for identity exploration. Matusitz (2005), explained, “One of the characteristics of the Internet is that it has been associated with freedom of self-invention, such as intentional gender swapping.” Along the path, conflicts may arise when individuals get involved with one another, for example, if one is a Realistic and the other is Fantasy. Such would be the case if one person is looking for a RL relationship and has an avatar that is what they consider a close representation of themselves, while the avatar they might develop feelings for may be a Fantasy or Roleplayer that is seeking gratifications in the only virtual realm with no desire or expectation of taking that relationship into RL.

The key element in such a situation is communication and understanding the motivations and expectations of all participants. As Matusitz explained:

> Philosophers like Turkle (1997) argue that human beings are not deceptive on-line if only because they do not really become someone else (what they actually do is split their identities into real life and online parts. An individual's identity, she contends, "is the sum of his or her distributed presence" (p. 1101). The self no longer simply plays different roles in different settings. Rather the self exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time (Turkle, 1997).

To date, there has been scant research exploring the strengths and weaknesses of relationships formed in the virtual world, whether they are taken as seriously as RL relationships, or how they are impacting the way individuals look at their RL relationships.

Finding Trust and Reciprocity Online

As previously stated, central to social capital are the issues of trust and reciprocity. Scholarly research asserts that trust consists of three distinct beliefs or factors that are often intertwined including "ability, benevolence, and integrity" (Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze, 2002). Ability represents the skills or competences an individual has in a specific area. Benevolence "is the expectation that others (i.e. trusted parties) will have a positive orientation or a desire to do good to the trustee" (p. 276). Finally, integrity assumes that individuals "will act in accordance with socially accepted standards of honesty or a set of principles that the trustor accepts, such as not telling a lie and providing reasonably verified information" (p. 276). Ridings, Gefen and Arinze (2002) found that benevolence and integrity are essentially synonymous in a virtual community because the accepted norm of behavior IS benevolence.

To date, research regarding trust in the 3-D virtual world is limited and what has been done has focused primarily on community trust or in regard to commerce and exchange of goods and services. Ridings, Gefen and Arinze (2002) concluded that trust may even develop differently in different types of virtual communities such as

social networking sites versus athletic forums and message boards. Likewise, they found that individuals may use greater discretion regarding what type of information they're willing to exchange, as "there may be certain types of information for which trust is more important" (p. 290). And, while social networking sites, forums and dating sights have had much greater exposure in both consumption as well as news coverage, there has been a great deal of research especially exploring the lack of trust in those social virtual environments as a result of such problems as "cyberstalking."

Anecdotal evidence reported in news headlines would lead one to believe that the Internet is a dangerous place where surfing the Web is more like strolling down a dark alley. Take for example, an Associated Press story in 2008 about a Missouri woman who was accused of cyberbullying when she posted photos, an email address, and cell phone number of a 17-year-old on Craigslist suggesting "the girl was seeking a sexual encounter" (http://news.aol.com). Likewise, consider the story of another Missouri mother who created an online persona of a young man who courted a 13-year-old girl, only to then tell her "The world would be a better place without you" (The New York Times, 2008). The girl committed suicide and the mother was subsequently convicted of three misdemeanor counts of computer fraud for misrepresenting herself on MySpace, a violation of the terms of service of the social networking site and a violation of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act of 1986. And most heinous perhaps are the crimes of cyberstalking, including cases in both the U.S. and in England of obsessed love triangles that formed online and ended in murder. Many researchers have asked hypothetically, "How can you trust someone who you can't see or have never met in person?"

Additionally, a paradox exists online between the veil of anonymity that allows many individuals to participate in ways they may not either be willing or able to (whether for political, religious, status, or behavioral reasons) in the real world, and the trust that comes from knowing with whom you're interacting. In e-Commerce, trust is not an option. To that end, reputation systems have recently been developed that rate a person's behavior and reliability in completing an online transaction such as found in e-Bay and Amazon.com sites.

Interpersonal communication and personal influence has taken on new meaning online, sometimes as a result of anonymity. When working offline, Sunstein (2006) reported that individual members of groups are often likely to follow authorities or defer to consensus, leading to Noelle-Newmann's "Spiral of Silence" (Shoemaker, et al, 2004). This is especially problematic for low-status members of a group. However, Gillmor (2006) found that online participation from citizen journalists has created participation "from people on the edges" (p.100). He discussed how open source politics provided a voice for people who otherwise would never have been heard.

However, allowing individuals to participate in an online forum without identifiers often eliminates biases that members of the group may have toward age, race, gender, educational or authority level, or numerous other potential biases. This may encourage individuals who might feel marginalized in their real lives to be more socially adventurous in the virtual environment. In a study of friendship development in multi-user virtual fantasy environments, Utz (2000) found that friendship development was "only weakly correlated with the general trait sociability." She confirmed prior research (Parks and Roberts, 1988, Zimmerman, 1987, Roberts et al, 1997) that found that shy

people were less inhibited in computer mediated communication (CMC) and were able to form intimate relationships online more easily than in RL. Valkenburg and Peter (2008) also found that adolescents experiment with their identities online (pretend to be someone else when online) and those who communicated most often with people of different ages and cultural backgrounds were most likely to benefit via development of social competencies. They define social competencies as the "ability to effectively form and manage offline interpersonal relationships" (p. 210). They also found that those teens who reported being most lonely benefitted most from online identity experimentation in their "search for identity and struggle for connectedness" (p. 227).

Their work was in stark contrast to previous research (Nie, 2001, 2002, Kraut et al. 1998) that found isolating impacts of Internet activity. Nie expressed concern of more superficial relationships resulting in online communication and feared the decline of face-to-face relationships. He wrote, "Whatever wonderful things the wired and wireless will bring, a hug is not one of them" (2001, p. 434). Nie (2002) and Kraut, et al. (1998) also warned that Internet use was associated with decline in time spent with family members, as confirmed by Annenberg (2009), and in the size of one's real life social circle, increasing the potential for depression and loneliness. However, again, because of the 3-D interactive visual element of the virtual world and that sense of presence, many people may experience the equivalent sensation of a hug through animation of their avatar.

Likewise, the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Boase, 2006) reported that not only are people "able to maintain active contact with sizeable social networks, even though many of the people in those networks do not live nearby" (p. 1), but that media

multiplexity (i.e. personal contact, phone use, and increased Internet activity) leads to stronger personal connections. These individuals were more likely to reach out to one another for help. Ascott (1990) also discussed the "coherence in the global brain" as a result of the ability to connect with people all over the world. Indeed with technologies like Second Life and Skype, we can connect with people all over the globe at no material cost (besides the cost of your computer and Internet connection).

As McLuhan (1969) explained in his famous statement, “the medium is the message,” technology does not occur only on the conscious level, rather “All media, from the phonetic alphabet to the computer, are extensions of man that cause deep and lasting changes in him and transform his environment.” He further explained the effects of “hot” and “cold” media, where a cool medium, such as television, involves the viewer at a subconscious level as they are required to give meaning to the images they see. That involvement is augmented in the 3-D immersive world as the person is actually driving the action of their avatar as they interact with others. They are in essence creating the story of their virtual lives. For some, it is a mirror of their real lives or a surreal mirror of the life they’d like to have.

Research Questions

Because the researcher was seeking to better understand how digital social capital among romantic relationships and friendships is created in a digital virtual world, (working with the assumption that it does exist), this study set out to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1

How do people present themselves in virtual worlds as it relates to their sense of “self” in real life and as such, are they representing what they consider to be an

authentic, idealized, or an imagined self? Based on presentation of self and relationship motivations of Second Life "residents," how is trust and reciprocity developed in the 3-D immersive virtual world?

Research Question 2

How does trust and reciprocity in a virtual setting differ from trust and reciprocity in real life, and can it effectively cross geopolitical and cultural boundaries to create social capital via friendships and romantic relationships?

Research Question 3

What is virtual marriage? What is the average length of a virtual marriage? Is the virtual marriage in addition to a real life marriage (thus extramarital)? How many of these virtual marriages precede real life marriages? How does virtual marriage affect real life attitudes toward marriage and real life family social capital?

Research Question 4

What are the primary uses and gratifications of the individuals participating in Second Life?

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Rationale

This study looked at the development of trust and reciprocity in the virtual realm and understanding how individuals function in a unique environment. A qualitative approach was employed including ethnographic study. As Lindlof (1995) explained, "ethnography traditionally tries to describe all relevant aspects of a culture's material existence, social system, and collective beliefs and experiences" (p. 20). Indeed the culture within the 3-D world has its own economy, social hierarchies, and ways of communicating in text (using chat tools), in voice and with non-verbal cues. As research emerges on these behaviors, there is evidence that many of the same social cues that apply in real life may apply in the virtual world. For example, in an experimental study of avatars and body language, Yee, Bailenson, Urbanke, Change and Merget (2007) found that when functioning in the virtual realm, individuals applied the same social norms they were accustomed to in real life including eye gaze and personal distance. However, in a world where people can fly, teleport or "shape shift," clearly all the usual social norms may not apply.

Additionally, interpersonal communication in the virtual world is theoretically challenged, especially if only communicating in text-based chat, when there are no facial expressions, body language or changes in voice tone to help interpret the nature of a conversation. For example, it is virtually impossible to detect sarcasm in text (if taken out of context). Understanding the nuanced behaviors as well as the nature of interaction taking place in a virtual setting requires in-depth qualitative exploration. This ethnography incorporated participant observation as well as content analysis of

discussion chat logs from which dominant themes were determined. These themes served as guides in semi-structured interviews.

Bill Viola, acclaimed contemporary video artist whose work incorporated electronic sound and visual images, posed the question, "Will there be condominiums in data space?" (1982). Although Viola's idea of condominiums in data space referenced the compartmentalized and stored data that could be shared by anyone, anywhere for collaborative work, entertainment, or information and distributed via cable, satellite, or computer, today there literally are condominiums in virtual data space. This study focuses on the culture that is emerging in the 3-D interactive immersive virtual environment, specifically in the social environment of Second Life. Unlike MMORPG's which are "games" that have goals, the online virtual community in Second Life is a social community where people live, work, play, shop, and seek entertainment. In Second Life, residents literally buy and design virtual land and build and furnish virtual homes. There is no fixed beginning or end, winners or losers.

To best understand the evolution of this culture it is important to look at the growth of its online community in a relatively short time span. Although the creators of Second Life, Linden Lab, launched the virtual world in 2003 and celebrated its 100,000th "resident" in 2006, the majority of the growth has come since then with approximately 15 million accounts as of January 2010. Not all of these accounts, however, represent active participants. Linden Labs reported an average of 5,000 concurrent users in the first quarter of 2006 compared to a peak of nearly 90,000 concurrent users in the first quarter of 2009 (Linden Labs, 2009). Also of interest is the number of hours typically spent in Second Life; 18 percent of its users log in for more than 50 hours per month.

These “heavy” users may be business owners, performers, educators, students or simply socially active residents seeking an alternative or supplemental reality. Considering thousands of them spend hours per day “in-world,” they have truly created a new culture worthy of exploration.

Because relatively little is known about this new type of digital culture, qualitative methodology was chosen for this research. Through qualitative exploration we can begin to identify themes, systems, and norms within the culture from which quantifiable research can emerge. First, one must understand what defines the culture. Such a method of inquiry helps form an understanding of the nature of reality as created by the systems, functions, and beliefs as they exist within that reality (Lindlof, 1995). From an ontological perspective, virtual reality is experiencing a rapid metamorphosis similar to any other new culture. Anecdotally, some have equated it to the “Wild West,” where growth occurred so rapidly, that the rules and mores of the system had to evolve quickly to avoid chaos.

Qualitative research assumes “reality is subjective and multiple” (Creswell, 2007). Reality in the virtual world is completely subjective to the extent that in Second Life, not only do the inhabitants of the culture have an opportunity to create their “selves” in the image they choose, but also the environment is designed and built by its residents who can create any environment they choose with none of the physical limitations of RL. Qualitative research also provides an epistemological assumption that the researcher becomes part of the culture being observed and the axiological assumption that the researcher is cognizant of values and biases and shares an interpretation of the culture that is blended with the interpretation of those being observed. Qualitative inquiry

solicits detailed narratives from the respondents in order to best understand their values, beliefs, feelings, and their own interpretation and personal understanding of the culture in which they reside. Rhetorically, qualitative research also provides the opportunity to tell the story of the culture in a rich, descriptive narrative form that provides a unique view of the culture being explored (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative methodology also requires that the researcher spend large amounts of time within the contexts of the culture, probing into the lives and minds of its inhabitants to reveal details before making generalizations (Creswell, 2007).

Because ethnographic study seeks to explore and define the very nature of a culture, the researcher must describe the social setting, identify and analyze data for themes and patterned regularities, define how the culture functions, and provide a narrative presentation. As Anderson and Meyer (1988) explained, “Qualitative research methods are distinguished from quantitative methods in that they do not rest their evidence on the logic of mathematics, the principle of numbers, or the methods of statistical analysis” (p. 247). Rather, qualitative research measures the actual words, gestures, and social actions as they are displayed in the natural setting (Lindlof, 1995).

Structural Challenges to Digital Ethnography

With the study of new technology and new environments come new challenges. In the digital or virtual realm, for example, the researcher is dealing with “virtual” people. Fundamentally one must ask, “Is this person real?” and “How does the information collected relate to physical reality?” Perhaps most important is the question of why that differentiation is important. Distinction between virtual and real is critical in collecting data. For example, Turkle (1995) explained:

> Virtual reality poses a new methodological challenge for the researcher: What to make of online interviews and, indeed whether and how to use them. I have chosen not to report on my own findings unless I have met the Internet user in person rather than simply in persona. I made this decision because of the focus of my research: how experiences in virtual reality affect real life, and more generally, on the relationship between the virtual and the real. In this way, my work on cyberspace to this point is conservative because of its distinctly real-life bias. Researchers with different interests and theoretical perspectives will surely think about this decision differently (p. 324).

The separation between person and persona raises a common dilemma reported by digital ethnographers with a wide array of thoughts and processes adopted. For example, Taylor (1999) explained, "issues of plural existence, anonymity/disclosure, and reliability" challenge validity and reliability. He posits, "At what level is it necessary or desirable to actually prove in some fashion the offline identity/body of a given participant?" (p. 443). Likewise, as previously discussed, questions are raised regarding the authenticity of responses from virtual beings when they are not only anonymous, but often in an altered state of "self." On the other hand, this raises the issue of truth in any form of personal data gathering whether it is online or offline. For example, in a study of young adults attending clubs, even when knowing they were going to be tested for drugs, 41 percent of the participants lied about their drug consumption to the researchers, claiming they had not used any drugs (Johnson, Voas, Miller and Holder, 2009). This raises important questions about truth in data collection via interviews and questionnaires in general, not specific to online but to all data collection.

Likewise, in Carter's (2005) ethnography of the virtual world Cybercity, she found "verifying the authenticity or truthfulness of the data I have collected is no more problematic in this particular environment than any other" (p. 151). As she explained, it

is through ethnographic research that we are required to continue to collect data, reflect on it, and understand that it is "situationally negotiated, rather than an objectifying process to be undertaken only when analyzing the data themselves" (p. 151). In fact, it could also be proposed that because sociological research very typically requires assurances of anonymity, participants may feel even more secure in revealing their most authentic selves when they are responding as their virtual selves.

In addition to the questions of validity, reliability and authenticity of data collected in a virtual world, other challenges emerge as well. Felden and Kafai (2008) identified three challenges specific to interpreting data in the virtual realm. They identify the first as the challenge of "determining an appropriate scheme for reducing the massive quantity of data." Operational variables may include measures of time spent in-world on a weekly basis as well as how long they've been a resident, dollars spent, mouse click counts, number of friends or groups, quantity of chat, and hours of voice logged. The second challenge is measurement of activities such as "teleporting" or "changing skins" that cannot be reconciled in RL. Measuring differences or similarities between RL and virtual life would be impossible in this regard as we don't have those options in RL. Finally, the third challenge is being able to "capture relevant offline events that occur unobserved in users' physical surroundings which influence, complement, or give alternate meaning to their online actions" (Castronova, 2005). Such actions would include conversations that may be taking place in RL that influence actions in the virtual world of which the online observer would be unaware.

With these challenges and observations in mind, this research employed an online ethnographic study of the culture and communities being formed in the 3-D online social

environment of Second Life. This ethnography utilized participant observation, content analysis of chat logs from in-world discussion groups, and semi-structured interviews with the knowledge that the data collected is specific to the online identities and cultures observed only. The first step required spending adequate time in Second Life as a participant in the culture in order to observe the cultural norms, themes, motivations, and social behaviors from which to best identify the questions that were developed for the semi-structured interviews.

Second Life Community – a Digital Ethnography

This study began with the researcher spending significant time in Second Life over a period of more than one year, observing numerous virtual "communities." These communities vary as communities of interest, such as music or intellectual discussion; communities of "residence," where individuals actually rent or purchase a virtual home; or social communities, such as role play environments also called "sims," an abbreviated term for a simulator and virtual region hosted by a single server CPU. Many of these communities also reflect cultures that are not deemed socially acceptable in RL including a multitude of BDSM sites, vampire communities, and sexually explicit activity.

As just one example of Second Life community, the music communities represent artists from all over the world who perform live music from their studios via real-time web stream. These musicians build up fan bases over time when individuals join their formal groups in order to get notices about the performance times and special events. For example, Maximillion Kleene is a pop musician from Canada with approximately 1,500 members in his group; Mankind Tracer (Seth Regan) who also performs primarily rock/pop music, from California, has almost 2,000 group members; Dexter Ihnen

(Dexter Moore) from Australia, has approximately 800 group members; and XanderNichting Writer (Xander Nichting), an electric violinist from the Netherlands, has nearly 400 group members. These performers will play a couple of times a week or several times per day. For many musicians, the more often they play, the larger their fan bases become and the more familiar the fans become with one another. Not unlike going to a club in real life, the "regulars" will often interact as friends would.

The education and library communities are also thriving. Linden Lab currently claims that, "Hundreds of leading universities and school systems around the world use Second Life as a vibrant part of their educational programs" (Linden Labs, 2009). One of the tools available in Second Life, for navigating places and events, is the "Search" feature. For example, in January, 2008, typing in the keyword "university" in the "places" search yielded 352 results; "college" yielded another 162 results; "education" included 162 results; and "library" resulted in 201 sites. Perhaps more impressive was the 636 responses to a search for "education" in the "groups" tab.

Because of the time zone differences, it is important to visit the virtual world at different times throughout the day in order to meet people throughout the real world during peak Second Life network traffic times. With a presence in the virtual world at all times of day and night, it is possible to make friends with people throughout the U.S., South America, Canada, Europe, and Australia. Although there is a strong contingent of Asian residents in Second Life, typically there is a language barrier, making relationship formation difficult.

Mixed Methods: Participant Observation and Semi-Structured Interviews

When defining the role of participant observer, Lindlof (1995) explained that over time and through active involvement within the community of study, relationships form.

He wrote, “The relationship with members that makes this possible can be an enduring one, lasting for weeks or months” (p. 145). Additionally, it’s through this participation that the researcher is able to identify gatekeepers and key informants within the culture. Participant observation included weekly discussions about evolutionary psychology and “the cyborg as self” at “Thothica” at Clemson University’s island, bi-weekly discussions at the SL/RL Relationships group, and occasional attendance at the discussions of personality exploration at the “Delphi Project,” a sim that offers “a place and a process that encourages objective self-examination” (Delphi Landmark in Second Life). Additionally, a virtual home was purchased in a community where it is possible to get to know “neighbors” and better understand the social community from a residential perspective. There were approximately 25,000 private residential regions of virtual land in Second Life at the end of 2009 (www.secondlife.com). These regions may contain single or multiple residences which are bought or rented by individuals.

Lindlof (1995) described the role of participant-as-observer as a researcher who “enters a field setting with an openly acknowledged investigative purpose, but is able to study from the vantage point of one or more positions within the membership” (p. 144). Recognizing the researchers’ role in Second Life as one of observation and data collection, friendships were developed with the members of the virtual envirnoment who were very willing to openly share about their real lives and Second Lives and thus create an initial understanding of the culture and its functions. One case is a couple from New Orleans who is married in RL but whose avatars are single in Second Life. This married couple willingly explores their sexuality through relationships with others, even “partnering” with others (the Second Life equivalent of marriage) but with “the rule”

that neither of them will ever meet their virtual partners in RL. They are very comfortable with this arrangement. The researcher had also met other friends who have virtual partners while being married in RL, where their RL mates are completely unaware of their online activities. In one case the researcher received an email from one single friend whose partner was married in RL. His partner's husband was not aware of her online relationship until recently. The email read verbatim:

> "Good morning… about 6:00 am, on Saturday, I got a phone call… from x's husband,,, threatening to kill me… thought i should share,, if I turn up missing… his name is, XX, and you are the only person to know this."

One of the challenges of observation in a virtual environment is that nearly every avatar is young, fit, and attractive. For example, in the live music venues where a vibrant culture is emerging, most of the avatars are dressed appropriate to a venue. For instance, if the concert is held in a virtual ballroom, the avatars will be dressed in formal attire. Occasionally formal attire is required or the avatar will be asked to change or leave. Typically, however, avatars are dressed casually and most women are often dressed in very skimpy or provocative attire. In fact, finding clothes for a female avatar that aren't low cut or risqué can be challenging. Additionally, many environments are created for role play, thus a Second Life resident may be in-world in theme-based attire that isn't even necessarily human. As such, it will be important to understand if the avatars who participate in the interviews perceive their lives in SL as fantasy or reality as previously discussed, when considering online identity and motivations for participating. Why do people spend time in the virtual world? Are the seeking companionship or love? Have they created a visual representation of themselves that is designed to attract someone sexually or romantically? Many of the people encountered in Second Life consider their experience a blend of a dramatic story that might be read

in a novel or watched on film, with a touch of reality as the player becomes immersed in the media environment and becomes the “author” and “actor” within their own virtual story. In a sense, it becomes an augmented reality or an extension of their real lives.

Recreating reality goes so far in Second Life that even seasons matter. In the winter months traffic increases in Second Life as might be expected since more people seek indoor activities. During this time more sims take on winter themes and offer simulated seasonal activities such as ice skating and skiing. During the holiday season, commerce explodes with holiday decorations for environments and homes, just as it does in RL. Avatars purchase virtual Christmas trees, lights, and stockings for their virtual houses, and virtual fashion changes to winter designs. These items are stored in an avatar’s “inventory” which they keep permanently. Inventories reside in the Second Life servers so they can be accessed from any computer that an user logs in on.

In addition to participant observation, to get the in-depth and rich context of life in the virtual culture, semi-structured interviews were conducted entirely in-world and in text chat with avatars recruited from a number of sources. Qualitative research incorporates observation, interviews, analyzing texts and documents, and recording and transcription (Silverman, 2001). Triangulating data from a number of methods such as this adds rigor and complexity to qualitative data collected. While many researchers seek to quantify measures of behavior, it is through the rich textual and graphic expressions that we learn about the intricacies of this 3-D online culture.

The researcher established an identity and built trust with numerous individuals and groups that represent international virtual “communities” from which participants were recruited for this research. These recruitment sources included discussion groups

in Second Life, from real life psychologists currently doing research in Second Life and from word of mouth. As previously noted, the researcher attended weekly discussion groups regarding Second Life relationships. This group had been meeting in Second Life for more than a year and developed a loyal group of regular participants who have created a sense of "community" in this virtual environment. Some members of those communities who did not have an interest in participating told friends who they thought would be willing to be interviewed, creating somewhat of a "snowball sample." As Boellstorff (2008) explained about a snowball sample, "it is a desirable apporaoch for ethnographers, who typically acknowledge their partiality and seek to trace social networks rather than artificially isolate members of a culture through randomization" (p. 76).

Participants

Most communication in Second Life is done using a text-based chat, and Second Life offers a feature to log all chats with other avatars either as private or local chats. Participants in weekly discussion groups were informed that their chat would be logged for public archive and these chat logs were used for content analysis purposes. Review of these chat logs enabled the researcher to identify themes that emerged in the "local" chat dialogs exchanged in an "instant message" format. Analyses included several months of discussion logs from several of the relationship group meetings previously discussed (See Appendix E). Content analysis of these discussions revealed a number of themes about trust and reciprocity especially due to the nature of Internet communication. These themes guided the focus of the semi-structured interviews.

To date, most research on online presence has been done using questionnaires, and with mixed reviews (Schuemie, et al, 2001; Slater, 2004). To best explore the

depth of experience of these individuals, the final component of this research collected personal insights and expressions from semi-structured personal interviews. These interviews were conducted in private settings within the virtual world with the 25 individuals who volunteered in response to the notices sent to the discussion group members.

Because this study proposed to evaluate the experience of residents in the virtual world, all communication (including the semi-structured interviews) was digitally exchanged. The researcher made the conscious decision to accept the validity of the information provided based on the experience as self-reported by the avatars just as one must presuppose that in any research, the participant (real or virtual) is telling the truth. While the virtual representation of self provides the opportunity to veil or deceive with the mask of an avatar, the enhanced anonymity of computer mediated communication also creates sense of comfort in speaking without fear of judgment or negative real world implications. As previously mentioned, prior research found that individuals who communicate on the Internet tend to be much more open with their information in this medium, often sharing personal thoughts and feelings that they may never say in person (Ruggiero, 2000). Likewise, they "unquestionably accept information via the Internet that they would not accept so readily from another medium" (Dicken-Garcia, 1998).

To recruit participants for interviews, notices in the form of "note cards" can be created and sent en masse in Second Life as event or activity announcements to avatars who join groups, such as the "SL & RL Relationships" group or retail groups. They are in essence the equivalent of advertisements or press releases in the virtual

world. Note cards had been previously used as invitations to participate in studies conducted by researchers at the Virtual Studies Research Institute at Minnesota State University Moorehead when it offered anyone in the group $300 Linden (the Second Life currency which is the equivalent of just over one U.S. dollar) to participate. However, this research offered no financial incentive.

Note cards were sent from group owners to members of two Second Life membership groups inviting them to participate in this study by agreeing to a private and confidential interview that would last approximately one hour (see Appendix B). Those individuals who responded to the notices were then provided a calendar from which to choose a time slot that was convenient to their time zone. Interviews were scheduled over a five week time period between November and December, 2009 to accommodate the 25 people who agreed to participate. Qualitative research enlists a constant comparative approach to reach a saturation of categories or "looking for instances that represent the category and to continue looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained does not further provide insight into the category" (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). Likewise, although McCracken (1988) suggests eight is a sufficient number of interviews when conducting in-depth interviews, this research incorporated semi-structured interviews that continued to reveal substantial data on diverse issues. By the 25th interview, it was clear saturation had been achieved.

Participants represented six countries including the U.S., Canada, Switzerland, England, Sweden, and the Netherlands (see Table 1) so interviews had to be scheduled from early morning to late evening Eastern Standard Time (EST) to accommodate European times as well as those on the east and west coasts of the U.S and Canada.

Upon agreement of an interview time, an IRB-approved informed consent was sent to the participant again, as a note card with instruction to return it to the researcher to confirm their agreement to the protocol (See Appendix C).

Numerous anecdotal stories have celebrated the ease of developing international and cross cultural relationships in Second Life and this study revealed the extent of the loss of typical boundaries or obstacles in relationship formation as well as the subsequent challenges.

Interviews

The interviews covered a series of questions that incorporated both an understanding of level of presence experienced by the individual as well as further explored the themes that emerged from the participant observation and the discussion analysis. For example, in addition to statistical data such as how many and what type of relationships a person has experienced in the virtual world, the researcher investigated the strength of the ties created in the virtual world and how those relationships impacted the subject's real lives (See Appendix D). Relationships were defined by each individual since people experience friendship and romantic relationships in different ways and at different levels. For example, in Second Life, avatars can "partner" with each other. Such a partnership is defined by the Second Life website link:

> Second Life couples can now make their relationships official. Whether you are married or just connected, you can designate your partner on your profile in-world and make your relationship visible to the rest of the community. Send your proposal to the avatar of your dreams using the form below. Partnering, like real life marriage, costs money. To create a partnership will cost each partner L$10. If you decide to divorce later, the person requesting the divorce will be charged L$25.

Some couples see partnership as a true “marriage” and may even carry out a virtual wedding -- from something as simple as exchanging vows personally to very extravagant, high priced and very public wedding ceremonies.

Understanding the nuances and sensitivities of virtual life is important as many people who participate in online virtual worlds feel as though people who do not participate judge them as marginalized or as social outcasts. For example, during one discussion group, a discussion participant asked, “anyone tried to explain sl to rl friends? The response followed:

19:38] AAAA: LOL!!! YES!!!!

19:38] BBBB: hehe

19:38] CCCC: they don't get it at all... it is like i'm speaking a foreign language.**

19:38] AAAA: and they look at me like I have wings!

19:38] DDDD: they look @ you sideways.....lol

19:38] BBBB: ...yes...."the game"...

19:38] DDDD: yess

19:39] BBBB: it is hard to explain connecting on different levels

19:39] EEEE: i dont mention it anymore**

19:39] FFFF: WoW is a game...SL is not!**

19:39] BBBB: very hard for me

As Roulston, deMarris, and Lewis (2003) found, interviews can be challenging as participants may behave in unexpected ways and the manner in which questions are posed or actions taken by the researcher can alter the path of the interview. The researcher must use caution against interjecting personal biases or subjectivity, and in how they phrase or negotiate questions, and be aware of potentially sensitive issues.

This can be exacerbated by the balance between RL and virtual life, so the interviewees must clearly understand there is a respect for their identities in both.

The researcher was cognizant of her pro-innovation bias for the 3-D world and a natural tendency to seek positive perspectives. That in mind, it was important to also be aware of the challenges others face both in their real lives and in their virtual lives and to remain open to listening without leading the interviewees. Likewise, having been significantly immersed in the Second Life digital culture for more than a year prior to the interviews, the researcher was well aware of the technological challenges to communicating in the environment such as system crashes and "lag" (when the objects in the environment or text chat takes a long time to load thus creating false sense of time between responses which could easily be misinterpreted). Digital slang such as "LOL," an abbreviation for "laugh out loud," was also heavily used in text chat (See Table 1). In conducting live text chat interviews it was important to remain aware of potential text slang that may not readily translate, especially across cultures. Clear communication and confirmation of understanding by restating or summarizing responses was important to insure accuracy of the messages exchanged.

Table 1-1. Common abbreviations used in Second Life

Abbreviation	Meaning
Alt	alternate avatar, often people create more than one avatar for use in different settings
Avi	abbreviation for avatar
Brb	Be right back
D/s	Dominant/submissive (to reflect master/slave roles in gore or BDSM role play)
FL or fl	First life (an alternative way of saying 'real life')
Kk	Okay
LM	Landmark – a digital address or location in Second Life
LOL	Laugh out loud
NC	Notecard – used to save text in a file in inventory
OMG	Oh my God! (Oh my gosh!)
ppl or peeps	People
RL or rl	Real life
Rofl	Rolling on the floor laughing
SL	Second Life
SLT	Second Life time – Is the same as Pacific time (home of Linden Labs) and is used as the universal time in Second Life for scheduling purposes

Additionally, the interview protocol was pretested with pilot interviews conducted with two individuals to insure the questions were easily understood and that the interview process was constructed in a fashion that would be easily facilitated. Following these interviews, the interview question guide (Appendix D) was slightly altered to address clarification when asking about Second Life or real life. All quotes included in this analysis were left in their original form, including the misspellings and text abbreviations to capture the true essence of the communication exchange.

Interview Process

Upon receipt of the Informed Consent and confirmation of a time for the interview, the researcher would provide the interviewee with a "land mark" to her private residence. By clicking on the "teleport" button on the land mark card interviewees received, their avatars were automatically "teleported" to the digital location in Second

Life. Two participants requested the interviews be conducted in their private homes instead and their request was obliged. The researchers' interview space was in a virtual living room in a snow covered cabin in the mountains. A couch and chairs were arranged in front of a blazing fire in the virtual fireplace, creating a warm and welcoming ambience. Because it was a private residence in a remote location, there was little chance that any unwanted or unwelcomed visitors would interrupt the interview. Once the interviewee arrived, they were asked to be seated, asked if they were comfortable, and given a brief introduction to the research and to the interview. To insure privacy, the chats were conducted and logged in "private chats" which open a separate instant message screen on the monitor. These can only be seen, read and accessed by those in the private chat.

Because the researcher was interested in the development of trust and reciprocity in the virtual realm, the interview questions explored whether or not the avatar being studied reported being honest with the people they encounter in their virtual activities and what level of trust they have in their interactions with others. The semi-structured interview was designed in a fashion that would allow open ended comments and permit the interviewee adequate opportunity to reflect and respond on interests that were of deeper significance. The interviews took approximately one to two hours. The interview guide/protocol began with a few "demographic" questions about subjects' real life and virtual gender, age, the average amount of time they spend in the virtual world as well as their level of experience in MMORPG's and their current relationship status both in and out of the virtual world. The researcher noted the location of the interview, the

position of the interviewee, and how stylized the avatar was (i.e. have they spent time customizing their avatar and dollars on their skin, hair, shape, etc).

The interviews then probed how the subject perceived their experience in the virtual world, in what type of activities they participated, and in what type of interactions they engaged. These interactions could be personal, intellectual, romantic, or professional. This research also sought to explore the depth of connection these individuals experienced with others in the virtual world and how presence, as well as their levels of trust and reciprocity, influenced that connection. Ultimately, participants were asked to compare this interaction and depth of connection with their real life relationships to determine if there was a different level of trust and connection with the individuals in their real lives as opposed to in their virtual lives. The final question asked the participant to indicate how they believe their virtual relationships have influenced their real life relationships (see Appendix D).

The author had been very clear with virtual residents that she was a researcher and was interested in studying relationships in the virtual world, also assuring them that nothing they revealed to her would be used in her research without prior formal consent. At this time, establishing formal consent in the virtual world is still complicated from an IRB perspective as there is little agreement on whether “virtual people” can be studied as “real people.” However, as more research is being conducted in the virtual realm, especially with online surveys, the line between virtual and real is becoming less distinct. IRB protocols were followed assuring anonymity for both the avatar name (or virtual persona) and the real person behind the avatar. No real life identification was requested. Likewise, the author followed the “Ethical decision-making and Internet

research Recommendations" from the Association of Internet Researchers ethics working committee (Simteach, 2002) for all other data collection (http://aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf) (Appendix 1).

Potential Issues with Online Interviews

Even though there is a "voice" feature which can be easily activated in Second Life in order to communicate using voice via a computer microphone, the researcher chose to use text as not all avatars have the technology or willingness to speak in voice. One of the most potentially difficult challenges of reading text chat is to be able to follow the flow if more than two people are interacting and if there are not clear parameters in how to indicate the conclusion of a written thought in conversational tone. This is evidenced in reading the discussion chat logs from the RL/SL Relationships discussion chat logs (Appendix E). One method used to address the issue of conversation flow is to request in advance that when concluding a line of thought, that the avatar finishes their line with **. This strategy is implemented at the beginning of all chat discussions and was also utilized in the general instructions given at the beginning of each interview.

Also, as previously mentioned, occasionally there are issues with "lag" or brief time delays on delivery of text which can sometimes cause responses to show up out of order or can cause an unnatural pause which can be misinterpreted as intended. Or, when more than one person is communicating in a chat conversation, it can require additional effort to determine which response is aligned with previous statements unless they specifically address a comment by the avatar's name directly. Especially in analyzing group text chat, it is important to review it immediately following the conclusion of the chat to recall proper flow in the conversation and make note of any

potentially confusing structure in the conversation. Essentially, group chat is a written and visual equivalent of trying to be in a room full of people who are all speaking at the same time and being able to hear and keep up with each conversation simultaneously.

The final and perhaps most obvious challenge to online interviews is the lack of facial expression, body language or other nonverbal communication that may reveal important information including the use of sarcasm or an interviewee's discomfort in responding to sensitive questions. On the other hand, it can be argued, that this lack of eye-to-eye contact put the interviewee more at ease, for example in the case of one respondent who said:

> [15:07] INTERVIEWEE: But on SL, after spending so much time using text, I guess you can open up in different ways because you don't have to worry about blushing or your voice cracking when you say something that might be potentially embarassing.
>
> [15:07] INTERVIEWEE: Or ...looking people in the eyes.
>
> [15:08] INTERVIEWEE: Something that I apparently have a problem with.
>
> [15:08] Researcher: has that changed the way you interact in RL now?
>
> [15:08 INTERVIEWEE: Yes, definitely.
>
> [15:08] INTERVIEWEE: I think that I recognize to some degree that people expect you to ...
>
> [15:09] INTERVIEWEE: Act a certain way, put a certain inflection on your voice and wear your face in a way that 'conveys' the meaning of what you're telling them.
>
> [15:09] INTERVIEWEE: For instance, I could tell you something totally serious in text. And if it's in a serious context, you might take me seriously.
>
> [15:09] INTERVIEWEE: In RL, if I were looking at the ground and I said something that I wanted to be serious they might think I'm being facetious.
>
> [15:10] Researcher: so true
>
> [15:10] INTERVIEWEE: Or if I'm not loud enough. Or mumbling.

[15:11] Researcher: So you are changing the way you communicate to reflect that?

[15:11] INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. I don't like looking people in the eyes for some reason when I talk to them? I just let my eyes wander and look at objects irrelevant to the conversation.

[15:11] INTERVIEWEE: I don't even realize it.

[15:11] INTERVIEWEE: But, uh.

[15:12] INTERVIEWEE: I make the conscious decision to do it if I have to put on my 'GET SERIOUS' face.

[15:12] Researcher: great!

[15:12] INTERVIEWEE: "Time to be serious. Look them in the eye. THIS IS SERIOUS BUSINESS BECAUSE WE MAKE EYE CONTACT!"

[15:12] INTERVIEWEE shrugs.

[15:12] INTERVIEWEE: <_<

Analysis and Interpretation

All interviews were conducted by the researcher. Transcriptions were instantaneous as the interviews were conducted entirely in text chat. The transcripts of both the group discussions and the semi-structured interviews were saved, again as note cards in the researcher's Second Life avatar's inventory as well as copied and pasted to a Word document for content analysis purposes. Several weeks of discussion transcripts were read immediately following each meeting and then again multiple times to identify emergent themes (Lindlof, 1995) that would ultimately guide the focus of the semi-structured interviews. These themes included social interaction, interactivity, exploration of relationships with self and others, exposure to change and different ideals, values and cultures, development of and/or the lack of trust, balance between virtual and real lives and the impacts on their real lives. Likewise, the transcripts of the interviews were reviewed and then content analyzed to identify key words and phrases

using AtlasTi. The most common descriptive words recognized in the document were then searched in context and color coded by theme and eliminated if the number was driven by words included in the protocol rather than expressed by the interviewee.

In a culture that is still in its infancy, qualitative research can provide insights into the complex behaviors of the players within that culture which can provide a platform for future quantitative research. In qualitative inquiry researchers seek credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity in the data collected from the culture that is being studied (Mandle, 2001). Likewise, to achieve validity, the researcher must be explicit, vivid, creative, thorough, and sensitive. Credibility is the "truth" value of believability of findings. These can be confirmed by repeated observation and documentation over time as well as through direct affirmations of what the researcher has seen, heard, or experienced.

Angen (2000) suggests qualitative research must also seek agreement from competent others that the description, interpretation, and evaluation are correct. To that end, interview transcripts were sent to two "expert others" for review. These individuals both have clinical psychology backgrounds and had spent more than two years respectively in-world.

By looking at the development of digital social capital in human relationships without geographic, cultural, or political constraints, it was possible to better identify this virtual world as a unique "community" of study. The virtual community is an international community. Historically, courtship and marriage formation was based on the "pool of eligibles" or those individuals within a physical community that family and

cultural norms would permit. In the “metaverse” (the virtual universe), that pool has different limits.

To best convey the truest nature of the digital culture as it exists in Second Life, the following chapter unveils the themes that emerged, often as reflected in the raw text from the transcripts. These texts reveal the powerful ways that words and “emotes” (i.e. written descriptions of bodily reactions such as “sighs” and “smiles”) can create a rich sense of experience without the use of voice or visual body and facial cues. Additionally, there are a number of words or abbreviations that are frequently used in Second Life, creating somewhat of a new language much like texting on cell phones (See Table 2). Additionally, because it is text chat, spelling errors are common and typically accepted for the sake of speed. Some of the interviewees were cognizant of their typographical or spelling errors and would express embarrassment and apology. The interviewer attempted to continuously reassure participants that the content was what was important and that they were not being judged in any way for effective typing skills.

> [2009/05/20 7:19] Tredi Felisimo: this IS a CULTURE
>
> [2009/05/20 7:19] Tredi Felisimo: in its infancy
>
> [2009/05/20 7:19] Tredi Felisimo: what a gift for so many
>
> [2009/05/20 7:20] Tredi Felisimo: and it's like no other before it
>
> [2009/05/20 7:20] Tredi Felisimo: truly a culture without the usual barriers, but with new ones we have yet to understand

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to explore a new and relatively uncharted 3-D online culture and to determine why individuals participate in the virtual world and gain an understanding of the influence this new media technology has on their real lives. The most basic task of communication is still being refined as individuals of all languages and cultures are blending in this world without established political, economic or social boundaries. The primary form of communication is in text chat and in this environment an avatar can wear a "HUD" (heads-up-display) that will translate his text into almost any language, allowing him to interact with people from all over the world.

Although participation in Second Life is limited to persons 18 years old and older with access to a computer and the Internet, there is no charge to create a basic account. The humans at the keyboards can create a mirror image of their real selves or a completely fictional persona in this world, including the age, weight, height, color, gender, or even species they choose and begin to interact with others around the globe. With this blank slate and limited only by their imagination, these digital pioneers can either recreate their real lives (such as those whose businesses, educational institutions, or organizations function in Second Life) or create augmented realities where they work and play in a virtual parallel universe that blends real and virtual. Or they can immerse themselves in an entirely fictional world. But is it fiction, if the actions of the avatar are driven by a real human in real time with other real people in virtual form?

This study explored the nature of communication and of relationships as they form in the virtual world Second Life. As people seek to connect in new computer mediated

ways, there has been great speculation as to the positive and negative societal impacts of this mechanism. It has been portrayed as both a depersonalizing and isolating medium, and as a technological environment that creates new bonds in ways never before possible. Specifically, this research explored the uses and gratifications of Second Life users; the presentation of self in the virtual world and how it influenced trust in virtual interaction; how trust differed in the virtual environment and if that difference also influenced the strength of ties created there; and the definition of virtual romantic relationships and their influence on the way individuals approach their real-life relationships and marriages.

Participants

The researcher recruited a total of 25 avatars/people that represented a sample from multiple cultures, countries, socioeconomic backgrounds, races and religions. Independent research conducted for Linden Lab to examine "the psychographics (values, interests, personality, etc.) of Second Life (SL) participants and their media consumption" (Market Truths Limited, 2009) identified six segments of participants in the virtual world. These segments include Team Players, Entrepreneurs, Chameleons, Competitors, Connectors, and Apprehensives. The characteristics identified to establish the segments included extroversion, elusiveness, competitiveness, creativity, problem solving, connectedness, and anxiety about others.

Among the avatars who agreed to participate in this study, the mean age was 48.8 with a range between 19 and 69. The gender breakdown included 10 male and 15 female participants. Likewise, the study participants ranged from high school dropouts to PhDs, however the large majority (80 percent) was either in college or college graduates, often with advanced degrees (See Table 4-1). These demographic variables

aligned most closely with the “Team Player” segment of the Second Life population of which thirty-seven percent have advanced degrees and 70% have at least an undergraduate degree (Market Truths, 2009). Team Players are typically older, better educated and more affluent than the other five psychographic segments. Team Players are also more extroverted and are more creative than other segments of the Second Life population. As one might expect, as these are the types of individuals who are also more likely to volunteer in their SL and RL communities, they are also more likely to volunteer to participate in research.

These avatars had been in Second Life for as little as a few months to four and half years, with an average of almost two and a half years in-world, making them quite veteran in Second Life terms. To gain a perspective on user growth and time spent in Second Life, the number of users who logged in multiple times (the metric used by Linden Lab to determine avatars who are “engaged with Second Life”) grew from 35,000 in January, 2006 to 769,000 in December, 2009 (blogs.SecondLife.com, 2010). From these numbers, it can be surmised that someone with four and a half years would be considered an early adopter of this medium. No limits were given on how little or long an avatar was to have been in Second Life to participate in this study.

Table 4-1. Participant socioeconomic demographics

	Stylized	Male	Female	Age	SL age	Experience	Education
AA	10	X		55	3	5	PhD student
BB	9	X		42	1.5	5	Adv degree
CC	10		x	64	3.5	6	MSW
DD	10		x	49	3	7	PhD student
EE	10	X		56	2	5	h.s.
FF	7	X		49	2	4	PhD
GG			x	60	2.5	3	grad sch
HH	6	X		37	2.5	5	no h.s.
II	10	X		40	3.5	7	College
JJ	10		x	41	3.5	5	College
KK	10		x	34	2.5	4	grad/prof
LL	10		x	56	2	7	College
MM	10		x	39	2.5	6	grad sch
NN	6		x	58	0.5	5	PhD
OO	8	X		69	2.5	3	PhD
PP	8		x	38	2	6	College
QQ	10	X		19	5*	5	in college
RR	10		x	58	3	6	h.s.
SS	10		x	38	1.5	2	College
TT	7	X		60	3.25	5	Prof
UU	10		x	60	1	3	h.s.
VV	10		x	43	2	5	College
WW	8		x	61	0.5	1.5	College
XX	10	X		49	4.5		College
YY	8		x	46	2	4	PhD student
	9	10	15	48.8	2.4	4.8	
							12-adv dgr
	19 – USA						3 h.s.
	2 UK						1 < h.s.
	1 Sweden						1 prof
	1 Switzerland						7 college
							1 undergrad
	1 Netherlands						*4 yrs teen grid
	1 Canada						

Research Question 1: What are the Primary Uses and Gratifications of the Individuals Participating in Second Life? What are Their Motivations for Being in the Virtual World?

Key Themes

Seven themes emerged consistently in the discussion groups as well as in the pilot interviews and then were validated in the subsequent semi-structured interviews. These primary themes regarding the motivations for participating in Second Life included identity exploration, information/learning/intellectual growth, social interaction, sexual and romantic relationships, work/employment, entertainment and creativity. The focus of these results is from the specific and rich content from the semi-structured interviews. Thirty six percent of the interviewees (n=9) mentioned that they had been previously involved in other online social environments such as SIMS and Internet chat rooms and that Second Life had replaced much of that activity. Among the interviewees, 32 percent (n=8) recognized their time in Second Life as entertainment, most notably for attending music performances or such events as poetry readings. Only 12 percent (n=3) suggested it had replaced television watching time, although Second Life users only average approximately seven hours of television per week – significantly below the national average (Market Truths, Limited, 2009). However, that data did not reflect prior viewing history to determine whether increase in Internet or Second Life hours logged in had created a reduction of time spent watching television.

Identity Exploration

Throughout the nearly two-year period that the researcher was immersed in Second Life participating in discussions and in individual conversations, one of the most common topics raised was the exploration of self one could engage in with a sense of "safety" in the virtual world. As Avatar AA wrote:

[14:12] Avatar AA: the biggest benefit is that a person can explore many different personas and aspects of like such as BDSM, being a lawyer or a club dancer, without having to commit real emotions - one can always turn off the computer when one doesn't like what is going on**

[14:12] Avatar AA: sl is a place to try on many hats without having to buy one**

Although there is no way to know for certain because there is no way to authenticate whether people are telling the truth when they create their avatar (unless they create a premium account which requires identification), some early anecdotal estimates suggested that as many as 30 percent of the female avatars in-world are actually men in real life. Discussion participants often reveal that they have created an avatar either in their likeness, as an idealized image of themselves or as a totally separate and private identity enjoying the veil of anonymity to explore behaviors either deemed unacceptable or impossible (i.e. what is considered “gender-bending” – exploring identity in the form of the opposite gender -- or participating in animal or “furry” form). To that end, one question in the interview protocol probed the issue of identity exploration asking specifically what image they wanted to convey in the development of their avatar (often referred in the interviews as “avi” or “avie”).

For example, CC, a 64-year-old American woman had been immersed in role play in another online game (SIMS) prior to coming to Second Life. She had other friends she’d established relationships there join her in Second Life and she wanted to create a totally separate identity without fear of judgment. She wrote:

[17:33] Avatar CC: when i made this particular avie she was an alt to my primary...the character i brought from tso...a matriarch to a large mafia-focused family

[17:33] Avatar CC: and i wanted someone quite different...an innocent, quiet little gal...sorta passive

[17:33] Tredi Felisimo: interesting

[17:33] Tredi Felisimo: tso is SIMS online?

[17:33] Avatar CC: i knew she was going to be a slave...i created her to be one

[17:33] Avatar CC: yes, tso is the sims online

[17:34] Tredi Felisimo: kk

[17:34] Tredi Felisimo: just wanted to be sure

[17:34] Tredi Felisimo: thanks

[17:34] Tredi Felisimo: so this avi was an exploration of a different side?

[17:34] Avatar CC: yes, totally different...and secret from all but two of my older friends

[17:34] Tredi Felisimo: wow!

[17:34] Tredi Felisimo: was that hard to do?

[17:35] Avatar CC: i wanted to explore D/s....didn't really know about bdsm back then lol

[17:35] Tredi Felisimo: I can totally understand and respect the need to be private about that

[17:35] Avatar CC: sort of...i played both of them for quite a while...then Avatar CC slowly took over as my primary alt...now i go on cara maybe every couple of weeks to retrieve messages

[17:36] Avatar CC: yes, i knew there would be judgements and didn't want to deal with them

Creating a persona to explore alternative roles or lifestyles is only one motivation behind identity exploration. Others, such as Avatar MM, a 39-year-old graduate student reported changes in how she identified with her own identity as it translated to her real life behaviors and confidence because of the way people treated her idealized self in Second Life. She explained:

[12:42] Avatar MM: in RL I am overweight but well liked and dynamic in some ways but I suspected that if i was was thin I would get much farther and I wanted to see it first hand so my av doesnt look much different from me in RL just smaller

[12:43] Avatar MM: **

[12:43] Tredi Felisimo: so, sort of exploring your own psychological reactions as well as others?

[12:43] Avatar MM: yes

[12:44] Avatar MM: so I was much more dynamic and confident

[12:44] Tredi Felisimo: interesting

[12:44] Tredi Felisimo: and you feel others treated you differently?

[12:44] Avatar MM: I explored more ..while I am like that in RL I got further with it in SL

[12:44] Avatar MM: definitely

Avatar HH echoed Avatar MM's experience as he discovered his own emotional responses to individuals when he explained:

[13:00] Tredi Felisimo: You've exchanged RL identity, like the Facebook friend, before too?

[13:00] Avatar HH: yes

[13:00] Tredi Felisimo: how closely did you find they met with your expectations (that e-word)

[13:01] Tredi Felisimo: you must have had some idea in your mind about that person, before you offered your RL contact info, yes?

[13:01] Avatar HH: yes, there's that word... erm... I remember being surprised by my reaction to RL phtos of other poets

[13:01] Tredi Felisimo: surprised in what way?

[13:01] Avatar HH: I felt deeper judgements

[13:01] Tredi Felisimo: It changed the way you felt about them?

[13:01] Tredi Felisimo: explain deeper judgements, please...

[13:02] Avatar HH: we don't do ugly in SL unless it's to make a statement, that statement may be out on a limb.. I do have a saving "Fat Avatar HH" but I don't get it out often... one woman's reaction put pay to that!

[13:03] Avatar HH: my reaction was that I was not as intimidated by them

He went on to explain that when the poets appeared in their handsome or beautiful avatar form, he tended to place them on a pedestal. When he saw their real life faces, he also realized they were “just normal people.” The power of the visual influenced his interaction with them until he was aware of their real life looks. This reaction is in contrast with studies at Stanford University that found avatar height and physical presence translated into a competitive advantage when in a virtual negotiation that carried into real life (Yee, 2006). Such was the case for one participant who discovered that the interaction with avatars changed the way she looked at real people in a profound way. Rather than falling back on real life stereotypes or visual assumptions, this college professor discovered that because of her time in Second Life, she was changing the way she looked at people in real life. She explained:

[9:13] Avatar NN: and I've found it interesting when I've googled some of the speakers I'v heard

[9:13] Avatar NN: old guys in SL are young and beautiful in RL,

[9:13] Avatar NN: sometimes

[9:13] Avatar NN: it depends

[9:14] Avatar NN: I think that's the case in the one person I'm thinking of; he's a brilliant young guy

[9:15] Avatar NN: with a baby face in RL and maybe he thinks if he looks like an 80 year old people will take him more seriously

[9:15] Avatar NN: I also know a person who routinely changes avatars sometimes while you're talking to them

[9:16] Avatar NN: I've seen big peopel in education and SL services in here dressed really wildly and they seem to be challenging you to see through the get up to the content

[9:17] Avatar NN: that's something that's having an impact on my old lady grumpies about kids todays and what they were in RL

[9:17] Tredi Felisimo: so many creative intelligent people in here

[9:17] Avatar NN: I'm feel I'm getting much more tolerant of people and how they present themsevles

[9:17] Tredi Felisimo: can you expand on that last line?

[9:17] Tredi Felisimo: ahh

[9:17] Tredi Felisimo: also very interesting!

[9:18] Avatar NN: well it's one of those thing; when you've seen a guy with horns with fire shooting out of them explaining the islands he's set for the Spanish association of family physicians and the impact on their patient and physician education programs and you forget about the horns and the fire

[9:18] Avatar NN: then listening to a kid with dreadlocks tell you about their project and their research is so much easier, you just don't see the differences anymore an dyou hear the heart and the mind of the person a little better

[9:19] Tredi Felisimo: truly not judging the book by the cover!

[9:19] Avatar NN: at least I think that's true for me and I wasn't aware that I was doing so much judging because being fat I know I get judged and my husband gets judged and I thought I was more senstivie to other people's diversities

[9:19] Avatar NN: but being in here has made me really more senistive and accepting I think

Information/Learning/Intellectual Growth

As of January 2010, there were more than 200 universities worldwide with a presence in Second Life and the Second Life search feature also yielded 228 results for libraries. There are also numerous educational groups in Second Life including the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) which boasted more than

6,000 members. ISTE is a "nonprofit membership organization in real life providing "leadership and service to improve teaching, learning, and school leadership" (iste.org, 2010). In addition to the formal educational organizations and virtual spaces, one of the benefits consistently mentioned in conversing with people throughout Second Life is the ability to meet people all over the world, to learn about different cultures and to be intellectually stimulated.

For example, one interviewee explained she had moved from her hometown to a new location four years previously but had not been able to connect with individuals with whom she felt she could exchange intellectual discussion. She said:

> [6:24] Avatar PP: not to sound too terribly arrogant, this is a blue collar area and i had expected to redo the building and sell it as condos, moving on. but the market cratered and I am here now. I came form a reasonablly intellectually stimulating place and this is very different. nice people but not as weel educated generally
>
> [6:25] Avatar PP: Thothica was a really inportant place for me for the first year I was here. I spent time there several days a week.

Another 60-year-old male interviewee who had not completed college expressed his gratification for the ability to "interact with people who are intellectuals, and often they are professors, and they seem to like what I have to say – so it's pretty rewarding." In this environment, those who may feel they were marginalized in their culture for a lack of education have the ability to interact and achieve status based on what they bring to the community intellectually. As one European male interviewee who had left school at 16 due to life circumstances described, "external confirmation from others is wonderful… healthier than broadsheet, magazine, good-looking stereotypical 'better' people."

Social Interaction

Because the sample for this study was recruited from groups within an environment that is considered a social networking space, it would be logical to deduct that the participants would include social interaction as motivation to participate in Second Life. An interesting paradox emerges in this environment when considering the sensational headlines that warn about Internet scams, stalking, cyber-bullying, and identity theft. Those risks in mind, one of the startling recurring themes shared in the interviews was that people felt they could interact in Second Life more safely than they could in real life. That sense of safety was often related to a desire to behave outside their own "norm" whether that was expressing themselves more openly, getting romantically involved, or exploring their fantasies. For example, a recently divorced 39-year-old graduate student turned to Second Life after the breakup of her marriage. She had friends in real life who encouraged her to come explore the virtual world. She said:

> [12:34] Avatar MM: they wanted to go dancing all the time and I thought ummm I can just go down the street from my rl house and go dancing why inthe world would I dance in here
>
> [12:34] Avatar MM: but they are married with children they cant just upo and hang out
>
> [12:35] Tredi Felisimo: good point!
>
> [12:35] Avatar MM: and i thought hmmmm what would sl allow me to do that I ant or dont want to do in RL
>
> [12:35] Tredi Felisimo: very interesting!
>
> [12:35] Avatar MM: so when i thought of what it was thats what i did
>
> [12:36] Avatar MM: I had only been separated from my husband for a while and I went on a bit of a permiscuous streek but that not so safe living alone in NY so I decided
>
> [12:37] Avatar MM: that sl would be the safest place when i could be as wild as I wanted with less consequence

[12:37] Avatar MM: **

[12:37] Avatar MM: that's how my SL began**

The element of safety in the lack of real life consequence was reiterated in multiple discussion groups as well as in the interviews. When asked if he thought Second Life was safer to express himself more openly, another participant explained, “it so is!!! as people can always hide behind their av, and be the person they actually would like to be in RL.” He continued:

[12:54] Avatar XX: This I can say because I have met MANY SL ppl in RL

[12:55] Avatar XX: and I have seen av's being really ...

[12:55] Avatar XX: well

[12:55] Avatar XX: living it out...

[12:55] Avatar XX: Rock & Roll here in SL

[12:55] Avatar XX: but

[12:55] Avatar XX: in RL they don't look you in the eye

[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: WOW!

[12:56] Avatar XX: well

[12:56] Avatar XX: I couldn't believe the reall ppl sometimes if they told me who they were in SL

[12:56] Avatar XX: really amazing!!

[12:56] Avatar XX: but

[12:57] Avatar XX: I do think this can bring ppl closer to others, something they can't do (yet!!!) in Rl

[12:57] Avatar XX: I have seen a musician

[12:57] Avatar XX: in SL

[12:57] Avatar XX: saw him on ADMIRE gathering...

[12:57] Avatar XX: extreemly shy person

[12:57] Avatar XX: but

[12:57] Avatar XX: after that he really opened up

Avatar JJ also wrote, “sl is inherantly a safe environment you can try things in sl you wouldnt try in rl.... and as i have intimated i am an old soul in sl comparitively speeking and one for socialising and social networking.... so have encountered lots of people in sl,” while Avatar UU explained, “we are all coping with things that make this a safe play to explore and as i get to know individuals better, i gain insights into what makes them tick.”

In addition to Second Life being a “safe” place to experience social interaction, when asked specifically about social interactions and connections made in Second Life, only two participants indicated that their experience in the virtual world was purely work-driven and had very little interaction outside of their required work. The more typical response was an enthusiastic appreciation for bonds they’ve created internationally. As a professional woman in her 40s explained, “I’ve made friends with people, I know I would have never met otherwise. I also had the chance to talk to people from all over the world that I would have not have had the chance to do. It’s been an experience that I would not want to give up.”

Sexual or Romantic Relationship

Although social interaction is a strong motivator for participation in Second Life, many of the individuals encountered in the interviews and in two years of observation revealed that they were in search of either a sexual or romantic relationship. Sex on the Internet is nothing new. In fact, until 2009, pornography was the primary destination of the Internet until social networking sites became the most widely visited sites (Hitwise, 2009). Likewise, Internet dating has exploded. Wildermuth and Vogl-Bauer (2007)

found that more 93% of the nearly 680 million global users of the Internet are online building relationships and more than 26% of them are “romantic in nature.” Their research revealed that those involved in online romance found their relationships very emotionally intense but requiring quite a bit of caution to protect those emotions from online deception. Often, partners were already married and the online romance was an affair. Those trends were echoed in the results of this study.

One of the common themes revealed in the interviews was that these individuals were, as one participant explained, “seeking romance that seems to be missing in RL.” For example, when talking about her relationships in SL, Avatar LL lamented “I will tell you this..... I do wish my husband would come in here and type to me. I miss having love letters.” This response was reflected in several others’ interviews who reported being married in their real lives but seeking sexual or romantic bonds in Second Life. They often reported that their spouses were unaware of their Second Life relationships although others in the discussion group and one interviewee had come into Second Life because their spouses had encouraged it. One study participant indicated he had an “open” marriage that was open in Second Life while he and his spouse vowed monogamy in real life.

Of the 25 interviewees, 36 percent (n=9) were married, 32 percent (n=8) were single, .4 percent were separated (n=1), 24 percent (n=6) were divorced, and .4 percent (n=1) were in a cohabiting relationship. Fifteen (60 percent) were either in or had previously been in a Second Life relationship, only one of which was with their real life spouse and four of which were extramarital (See Table 4-2).

Table 4-2. Interviewee relationship status

	Male	Female	Married	Single	Sept'd	Divorced	Cohabit	Partnered
AA	X					x		
BB	X					x		formerly
CC		X				x		
DD		X	x					x-unofcl*
EE	X		x					Formerly
FF	X		x					
GG		X				x		
HH	X						x	x-unofcl
II	X				X			Formerly
JJ		X		x				Formerly
KK		X		x				
LL		X	x					
MM		X				x		X
NN		X	x					x-hub
OO	X		x					x-unofcl*
PP		X		x				X
QQ	X			x				
RR		X	x					x-unofcl*
SS		X		x				
TT	X			x				Formerly
UU		X		x				x-unofcl
VV		X	X					X*
WW		X		x				
XX	X		X					x-unofcl*
YY		X				x		
	10	15	9	8	1	6	1	15

**RL spouses unaware of SL partners*

A 61-year-old nurse in Canada described her relationship experience in Second Life as “rich,” “consuming,” and “fulfilling.” She said, “I have a well developed natural imagination. I delve right into any situation I might find myself in, in sl. I laugh uncontrollably, frighten easily, and have found an erotisicm in me that I never knew I had.” She is not alone in expressing the intensity of feeling in this virtual environment. In addition to the intensity is a sense of speed. As one participant explained, “I think everything goes 500 times faster in SL, just like day and night time.” This sense of

speed and intensity is also accompanied by a fragility of the romantic relationships. As one interviewee described:

> [12:35] Avatar RR: for some reason.. none of us seem to know why.. its much more intense here.. when you are in love... its very very strong.. the pain is very strong too.... I guess cuz you are just here.. no distractions.. you get closer.. im not sure.. relationships here.. tend to be very intense.. and dont last long.. that is not the case with me. *

Other interviews revealed the limitations of the online romances, most obvious is the lack of physical touch. Avatar AA said:

> [13:56] Avatar AA: some are friends and some are more romantic, although the romantic ones don't seem to last**
>
> [13:56] Tredi Felisimo: interesting point.... I've heard that a few times
>
> [13:56] Tredi Felisimo: Have you ever partnered with or married someone in SL?
>
> [13:56] Avatar AA: it is because people cannot accept the limited emotionallity of the platform**
>
> [13:56] Tredi Felisimo: can you elaborate on that?
>
> [13:56] Avatar AA: never partnered**
>
> [13:57] Avatar AA: sl is like email in terms of content deliver**
>
> [13:58] Avatar AA: limited emotionality, for a relationship to be sustained there needs to be a fuller emotional connection, this is why for me sl friendships last and the romantic ones vanish**
>
> [13:58] Tredi Felisimo ponders that a moment
>
> [13:58] Avatar AA: one cannot squeeze their emotions into this world to a degree that supports rich communication**
>
> [13:59] Avatar AA: deeper feelings require physical presence**
>
> [13:59] Tredi Felisimo: So the immersive nature and the sense of presence isn't adequate?
>
> [13:59] Avatar AA: for freindships yes for deeper relationships no**
>
> [13:59] Tredi Felisimo: interesting

[13:59] Avatar AA: the platform limits how far one can go in terms of relationship building**

While many people discussed the physical limits of the technologically based relationships, others, such as Avatar II talked about the deep connections that result BECAUSE of the physical limitations. In his experience, these relationships are built more on the emotional or even spiritual connection. He explained:

[13:26] Avatar II: well about the deepness of relationships

[13:26] Tredi Felisimo: yes?

[13:26] Avatar II: in SL you see the soul

[13:27] Avatar II: in Rl you see the body

[13:27] Avatar II: and smell

[13:27] Avatar II: if you can see the soul RL

[13:27] Avatar II: you probably marry

[13:27] Avatar II: lol

[13:27] Tredi Felisimo: agree!!!

[13:28] Avatar II: but often you dont get this far and marry anyway

[13:28] Tredi Felisimo: interesting dicotomy

[13:28] Avatar II: many women i meet

[13:28] Avatar II: want to be with my soul

[13:28] Avatar II: but not my body my money

[13:29] Avatar II: they have a a man

[13:29] Avatar II: who work

[13:29] Tredi Felisimo: we see each other more deeply when we can't see each other..... hypothetically

[13:29] Avatar II: but he has not interest in their soul

[13:29] Avatar II: so theay fill this gap

The relationships Avatar II described were deep and intense but from a distance as are the case with many Second Life relationships. It is not uncommon to hear of people from different continents becoming romantically involved sometimes with the intent to meet and other times, simply to maintain their relationship virtually. When asked about meeting her Second Life love, Avatar RR proclaimed:

> *[12:56] Avatar RR: no.. and I dont want to... [xxx] would show up on my doorstep.. he does not have my address.. they know im married.. and its only here... its never going to be real.. tho how you can say not real... when the feeling are certainly real*

This conflict between virtual and real was also a common thread in discussion of virtual relationships. When asked how SL and R relationships differ, Avatar BB, a 42-year-old European male explained, explained:

> ” They only differ in so far as those that try to draw a separation between RL and SL. Other than that there are no differences. Real people, real emotions, real feelings, real life.... To say that SL is different and not real is like saying work time is not real .... its a fallacy... it's an extension of first life… or as my database admin lecturer said... The computer is a digital representation of real life out there, and that that digitisation does not make it any less real that the wrold out there - he said pointing to a window.”

Sex and eroticism was also dominantly featured in the avatar experience. Again, as the researcher was observing relationships discussions, the topic of sex was raised in every meeting. For many the sex was tied to romance, although for others it was a purely physically driven act. One middle-aged male in the U.S. shared:

> When I first got into Second Life, I was overwhelmed by the ubiquitous imagery of young, healthy, attractive (and sometimes downright pornographically sexy) people. It was as if I had a huge porn video available, and though I try to keep my libido in check, the fantasies were extremely strong. I was like a teenager again in my avatar's "body", and I am afraid I made an ass of myself many times through that stage of my SL experience. I know that I have said some inappropriate things even to you, which in hindsight I regret. You know how strongly emotions and hormones can trump logic and social mores in the human experience. Sometimes I

look at my views of those occasions with shame, although I really do understand the reasoning, albeit shallow, behind them.

Work

Many individuals have come to Second Life with the dream of creating a business or generating an income. Many of them have achieved great success. In fact, the 2009 end-of-year economic summary for Second Life revealed that gross resident earnings in 2009 totaled $55 million in U.S. dollars. Additionally, more than 50 accounts generated $100,000 or greater in 2009 and the top 25 accounts, as a group, earned approximately $12 million (blogs.secondlife.com, 2010). Virtual real estate and sex animations rank among the highest selling virtual goods, although there are also thousands of people who make money through their virtual jobs. One of the participants in this study explained that she is a paid employee and superviser at one of the largest slave auction houses in Second Life as well as a photographer and builder (Avatar CC), another works as a DJ (Avatar II), and another is a musician who regularly performs live music in the virtual world (Avatar XX).

Creativity and Entertainment

Although the focus of this research was exploring the nature of communication and relationships in the virtual environment, the observations of the researcher as well as the interview results pointed to the ability to create and the entertainment value of Second Life as motivations to participate in the online world. For example, Avatar JJ revealed:

> *[12:45] Avatar JJ: what kept me here..... well thats my curiosity. I love to explore posibilities and try things. Develop and grow as a person... influence things and that is what kept me here until i found music and building and romance and all the other things.... but the blank slate that LL offered as a starting point was key*.

The blank slate she referred to is the content creation of this virtual environment. All clothing, buildings, textures, settings – even the hair and skin worn by the avatars -- are created by the residents of Second Life and exchanged in-world. Images can be created and enhanced in programs such as Photoshop and imported into Second Life and then scripted for animation. "Builders" are those individuals who create the objects and then either use them, give them away, or sell them. Others design and create environments that may begin with nothing more than a flat square "parcel" of "land" and then sculpt the space, purchase items (including plants and buildings), and design spaces that may function as social spaces such as dance clubs, nature settings, historic spaces, or homes. This "open source," user-created content is not typical to online 3-D immersive environments, and creates an opportunity for anyone to participate and explore building, design, and animation at virtually no cost.

In this research, "entertainment" included activities ranging from participating or attending public events, poetry readings and discussion groups, to dancing or attending live concerts. Among the participants in this research as well as those observed, there were many who shared a strong affinity for reading and literature and found Second Life was an animated extension of the literature in which they could immerse themselves. One avatar wrote in a letter to the researcher:

> Ever since I was a young boy, I have been drawn strongly to the universes of science fiction, voraciously devouring books, television shows, movies and anything else I could pour my mind into. Then, as a young father, I discovered the Chronicles of Narnia, and as I read them to my daughters, the transition into fantasy was easily made. The beings we found there had their own attraction for the fertile and imaginative mind. This was strengthened with my reading of all the Tolkien novels, and the imagery fostered in my imagination, even before I viewed any TV shows or films depicting them. So then when Faeries started appearing in Second Life,

the sight of a Faerie who had a real woman behind it was a "double whammy" for me.

Research Question 2: How do People Present Themselves in Virtual Worlds as it Relates to Their Sense of "Self" in Real Life, and as Such, are they Representing the Truth? Based on Presentation of Self and Relationship Motivations of Second Life "Residents," How is Trust and Reciprocity Developed in the 3-D Immersive Virtual World?

As mentioned in the findings of Research Question 1, exploration of self and representation of self in Second Life vary based on the experience the avatar seeks. Recalling the four Second Life user motivations found by Neustaedter and Fedorovskay (2009) including "Realists, Ideals, Fantasies, and Roleplayers," the present research confirmed those roles. If applying these roles to uses and gratifications, they could also be seen in two primary contexts: those who are augmenting their real lives in a virtual environment or have essentially integrated their real life identity with their Second Life identity; and those who are fully immersed in a separate and fictional or fantasy world. Neustaedter and Fedorovskay determined, "Realists are the users who consider their virtual selves to be an extension of their RL" (p. 187) and Ideals are those who "feel their RL appearance is less than ideal and aim to overcome perceived inadequacies" (p. 188). These users would be the Integrated /Augmented residents; those who consider their avatar synchronous with their real life identity operating in a virtual space.

The Integrated/Augmented Self

The integrated/augmented participants experience Second Life almost as another real space, like going from one room to another, albiet in virtual form. These participants often have their real life information in their profiles often because they have a work-related function in Second Life (such as professors and students or musicians who are attempting to create broader audiences). Additionally, these individuals may

have an idealized visual form in the virtual world but feel they reflect their authentic selves in the way they interact with others. For example, at nearly every SL/RL Relationships discussion, someone raised the issue of how they represented themselves to others:

> [19:36] MsQueen Quintessa: i treat my Sl like its real...b/c it is still a life
>
> [19:36] MsQueen Quintessa: its all about what you make of it
>
> [19:36] Sudonym Preez: Yeah, I agree with that. I cannot make myself do things in SL that I would not do in RL
>
> [19:40] Ashimi Moonites: i tend to see my avi as an extension of my soul personally**
>
> [19:40] XXXXX: So do I, Ashimi.

In her interview, Avatar JJ further explained how the visual image of the avatar was secondary to the personality reflected in the behavior of the avatar -- that her personality was true to her real self, but that her appearance was enhanced in Second Life. Her relationships formed based on the emotional chemistry, and once established, she altered the look of her avatar to meet the ideal of her romantic partner:

> [12:49] Avatar JJ: SL is a second life and in no way replicates the 5 foot 6 inch rotund short haired brunette with bad skin that i am in rl.... but for me it is not about recreating rl - because if that was my aim i wouldnt bother turning on the PC..... my avi has developed her own look over time.....
>
> [12:50] Tredi Felisimo: she/you are beautiful
>
> [12:51] Tredi Felisimo: and do you find you relate to "her" as "you"
>
> [12:51] Tredi Felisimo: ?
>
> [12:51] Avatar JJ: to be completely honest my avi has partnered twice and both times my partners have wanted an 'overhaul' (must of loved my shiny personality) and i was very much lead by what THEY wanted me to be.... but there is an art to it and i could guide you through recreation if you like
>
> [12:51] Tredi Felisimo: WOW! Avatar JJ, that's so interesting

[12:52] Tredi Felisimo: that they were really drawn to YOU, not the avi

[12:52] Tredi Felisimo: but the avi followed

[12:52] Avatar JJ: oh i would like to say no - but the truth is - i do big time take objection to big changes - she is a represenation of me

Avatar MM also found that her real life personality was a force that could achieve in Second Life what she could not achieve in real life because she "looked differently."

[12:44] Avatar MM: I wass able to move up alot faster in Sl than RL because i look tha part

[12:45] Tredi Felisimo: funny how we carry our biases into this world

[12:45] Avatar MM: yes but they can be manipulated more here

[12:45] Tredi Felisimo: in what ways did you move up? in social situations? in business?

[12:45] Avatar MM: both

[12:45] Avatar MM: circles I was never successful in in Rl I was in SL

[12:46] Avatar MM: the club scene... urban business... etc... people handed me the reigns in their business I consulted for everyone but in RL I had to fight so much harder to prove my self

[12:46] Avatar MM: with the same approach and knowledge

[12:46] Tredi Felisimo: so you see group heirarchies evolve here too

[12:46] Avatar MM: yes

[12:46] Avatar MM: certainly

[12:47] Tredi Felisimo: that is REALLY interesting, when you think about it

[12:47] Tredi Felisimo: how much visuals play roles

[12:47] Avatar MM: absolutely

[12:47] Avatar MM: an the more control you have over the visual the easier it is the elicit a desired response

[12:48] Avatar MM: I have intergrated myself I think think from the knowledge I learned in SL

[12:48] Avatar MM: now I just have to do the work

These participants commonly discussed psychologically integrating their real and virtual lives both from the real to the virtual and from the virtual to the real. It became a circular pattern where their experiences in each world influenced their behaviors in both. How they expected others to represent themselves was also influenced by the way they approached their own presentation of self. When asked how meeting someone from Second Life in real life changed their perception of their virtual friend, the distinction between virtual and real became even more blurred. For instance, Avatar LL reflected:

> [18:10] Tredi Felisimo: Did meeting your friends change the relationship at all?
>
> [18:10] Avatar LL: Yes! Brought us closer.
>
> [18:10] Tredi Felisimo: Amazing isn't it?
>
> [18:11] Avatar LL: Yes! And sometimes you look at their avatars and notice that they resemble their RL selves. I have come to think of my sister as both a nekko [a mythical cat-like creature] and a tall brunette.
>
> [18:11] Tredi Felisimo: Isn't THAT interesting!
>
> [18:11] Avatar LL: With the exception of the men who use female avatars.
>
> [18:12] Tredi Felisimo: Discovering personality traits that emerge visually in SL....
>
> [18:12] Avatar LL: And the furries.
>
> [18:12] Tredi Felisimo: lol
>
> [18:12] Tredi Felisimo: yes
>
> [18:12] Tredi Felisimo: that's hard to recreate in RL
>
> [18:12] Avatar LL: I think they don't emerge by themselves..... i think that you make an adjustment in your mind.

The integrated participants are likely to be willing to reveal their real life information to trusted friends in-world and be willing to meet their Second Life friends in

real life. They also are more likely to extend their Second Life contacts to other forms of media including social networking sites and webcam technologies, such as Skype, to further integrate real life connections before meeting or as a way of meeting in real life. This is in contrast to the immersed players who are the equivalent of the "Fantasies" and "Role Players" identified by Neustaedter and Fedorovskay as those who keep RL and SL completely separate and create avatars that appear nothing like themselves.

The Immersed Self

For the fully immersed participant, Second Life was an alternative reality rather than an augmented one. Many of these individuals "preferred" their virtual worlds to their real ones typically due to economic, emotional, or physical disabilities. As one interviewee who is a psychologist in real life explained,

> *"I haven't explored [the benefits of relationships] yet for myself but I have clinically observed that sl relationships are very promising to those who are disadvantaged in any way. SL is a very great leveler and appears to be the way of the social future to those who were and are confined."*

For these individuals who, for example, may not be able to walk in real life, they not only walk but dance, swim, fly, climb, or any other physical activity that can be done in real life but also those that reach beyond the limitations of real life (including gravity). In fact, two of the interviewees indicated that one of the original attractions they had to Second Life was that they had always had the common persistent dream of flying and found that they could "experience" it in the virtual world.

Having a social space was also important to homebound participants such as a full-time caregiver for a family member with dementia. She, like other caregivers observed in the virtual world who do not have the freedoms to leave their caregiving responsibilities, Second Life provides a social outlet without having to leave home. For

others, the ability to function in an alternative reality provides an opportunity to explore behaviors that may be deemed socially unacceptable by their cultural norms.

Still others who become immersed in the fantasy or role play culture of Second Life are not necessarily physically, economically or emotionally compromised in their real lives. Rather, they seek the private space to interact without perceived real life consequences. Such was the perspective offered by an internationally acclaimed recording artist who offered the insight that there are people, such as himself, who live under intense media scrutiny. In Second Life, they can have what they consider a normal conversation with people without the burden of celebrity. In such cases, it wasn't necessarily that the Second Life residents preferred their Second Life, but that it provided a safe social space that would not interfere with their real lives.

Individuals who are immersed in the fantasy of the online virtual world are not as likely to share real life information with anyone in the virtual world except in rare occasions when they may reveal their real life identity to those whom they grow to trust over time. These participants may even carry their virtual identity into other social media forms. For example, many discussion leaders or in-world artists have websites, Flickr pages, YouTube videos and profiles on social networking sites as their avatar identity rather than their real life identity.

The most extreme case of an immersed participant encountered in the researcher's two years in Second Life was a 40-year-old divorced man from Switzerland who reported spending 18 hours per day in Second Life. He consistently reiterated that Second Life was his real life as he stated, "I choose to be in virtual worlds as this has not been done before." He added:

[12:51] Tredi Felisimo: so, like frienships, and boyfriends/girlfriends, they come and go in RL, they come and go in SL?

[12:52] Tredi Felisimo: do you think they're any more or less "real" or "deep" in SL than they are in RL?

[12:52] Avatar II: its diffrent

[12:52] Avatar II: for me it is a 3rd way of communication

[12:52] Avatar II: 1st way

[12:53] Avatar II: the public way

[12:53] Avatar II: the public behaviour you show

[12:53] Avatar II: in job

[12:53] Avatar II: in a bar

[12:53] Avatar II: 2nd

[12:53] Avatar II: the private behaviour

[12:53] Avatar II: when you communicate to your husband

[12:53] Avatar II: to your kids

[12:53] Avatar II: to your best freidn at hom

[12:53] Avatar II: ion living room

[12:53] Avatar II: 3rd

[12:53] Avatar II: and new

[12:54] Avatar II: for human kind

[12:54] Avatar II: SL

[12:54] Avatar II: its diffrent

[12:54] Avatar II: both are in a alone state

[12:54] Tredi Felisimo: that's a fascinating perspective

[12:54] Avatar II: usually you dont talk in such mood

[12:54] Avatar II: you know what i mean

[12:54] Tredi Felisimo: totally

[12:54] Avatar II: usually you are alone

[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: right

[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: we sit alone in RL now, but we are connected and communicating with each other

[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: across the world

[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: and right in front of each other, virtually

[12:56] Avatar II: yes this is why i dont like voice

[12:56] Tredi Felisimo: ??

[12:56] Avatar II: voice does not keep up this privacy

[12:56] Tredi Felisimo: ahhh

[12:57] Avatar II: but i still can see you

[12:57] Avatar II: and read you

In communicating with the researcher to arrange for his interview, Avatar II also provided YouTube links of a documentary about his Second Life immersion and informed the researcher that his avatar identity was registered under the protections of Creative Commons. He indicated that as the divorced father of two children, he sees his children every other weekend and may see real life friends "every two weeks maybe." Yet, while he is completely immersed in his virtual life, this interviewee also indicated that in his romantic relationships, "I look for RL relationship they aim for virtual love."

Trust – of Others and of Technology

At the core of social capital are the elements of trust and reciprocity. If in fact a person is fulfilling a fantasy and is not willing to reveal his true identity in a virtual environment, how can trust be developed and what resources can be exchanged that

would benefit the individuals? When probed about trust in the virtual world, avatar response was quite varied. As one participant explained, “It’s more important to focus on what you have in front of you at the moment and you have to be clear about what your expectations are so that you can present that to that person up front.”

There were often tales of woe, especially in relationships as individuals got emotionally involved with someone who was perhaps carrying on multiple other relationships or had not represented him or herself honestly (i.e. single when in fact he or she was married). Such was the case of Avatar TT who had fallen in love with a person he thought was a woman dying of cancer but in reality wasn’t even a woman. One study participant reflected the sentiments of many when he admitted, “I usually only interact with avatars who include some aspect of RL in their SL behaviors/avatar… I am cautious of any avatar whose profile is empty – I basically avoid them.” Avatar profiles are one “filter” many use in determining how they may interact with another resident in Second Life. Another filter frequently recommended was the use of the voice feature. Something as simple as hearing that the person you were interacting with was at least the same gender as they claimed provided some sense of trust.

Another important revelation was that among those who indicated they could not share trust in Second Life, they were also not very trusting in their real lives. Making the comparison between trust in virtual or real life was also recognized in several discussion groups as well as in the interviews. Avatar GG suggested, “You know you meet people in rl and you don’t really know who they are initially either – it takes time whether it is in sl or rl.”

Another challenge to trust is the issue of leaving a digital trail. Avatar KK pointed out that, “maybe trust and revelation are always in conflict when there’s intimacy involved. It’s just here… things last. Our trust is recorded and saved, ready to come back and bite us.” When sharing intimate details with a love relationship, she continued, “The problem is the pixels and the data. We all have thousands of foolish moments… most of them are not stored on a server owned by a corporation... or copied and saved by a new friend or lover.” This was a savvy response in an environment where research has shown that people are so willing to reveal their most intimate secrets to their online friends (Yee, 2006), and in an era where personal diaries are now posted for the world to see in such sites as Facebook.

Even amidst the levels of distrust in the virtual world, trust still appeared to be built in very strong ways. As Avatar XX rationalized, “In SL it’s always easier to lie. That’s what makes being truthful the biggest challenge but in the end the most rewarding.” The portrayal of the depth of trust built in Second Life also emerged often as the study participants reflected on the power of using text chat for communication. For example, Avatar LL described how she developed trust with others in Second Life:

> [17:58] Avatar LL: I do expect them to be "real"..... in my profession that's a loaded word, because we have layers of reality like an onion. But I read an interesting quotation on someone's profile. I wish I could remember the author. It said something like....
>
> [17:58] Avatar LL thinks....
>
> [17:59] Avatar LL: "Sometimes (I paraphrase) the friendships we make when we correspond are the most intimate ones."
>
> [17:59] Avatar LL: I would have to agree there. There is always the possibility of deception through writing. But there is also a veil that is lifted.... a certain type of inhibition we have when we speak face to face is lifted.

[18:00] Avatar LL: sometimes when we write, we say more what we would not say, because we are at a loss for words in real time.

[18:00] Avatar LL: And sometimes it doesn't matter if we never meet in the flesh.

[18:00] Avatar LL: **

Friendship, emotional support, and a willingness to help people find things and learn in the virtual world were also most frequently cited sources of social capital among the participants. One of the consistent complaints about functioning in Second Life is the learning curve when first arriving. Learning the basic functions, much less navigating hundreds of virtual land regions can be overwhelming, yet there was a sense of community and camaraderie that was recognized. Avatar NN described her experience when getting started in Second Life through a Facebook friend when she said, “They took me to Chilbo and then I really started getting immersed in a community. That’s super important I think; to have somebody to rely on when you’re figuring things out.” Several of the study participants also revealed their eagerness to teach new residents and to help support them in their virtual lives.

Avatar OO was a 69-year-old retired professor and entrepreneur who had just finished selling off and dissolving a corporation in real life. He and Avatar II both discussed their interest in helping others create sims and learn how to do things such as photography and building in Second Life. Avatar II said, “I see myself as a supporter... there is almost nothing I cannot do in SL… so I answer questions.”

One of the most exceptional expressions of the support received in Second Life came from Avatar XX who said:

[13:24] Tredi Felisimo: as I was just about to ask... what you consider the benefits of the relationships you've experienced in SL

[13:25] Avatar XX: apart from the emotional bonds

[13:25] Avatar XX: I think it enriches a lot

[13:25] Avatar XX: opportunities grow

[13:25] Tredi Felisimo: what type of opportunities?

[13:25] Avatar XX: the benefits are really priceless

[13:26] Avatar XX: well

[13:26] Avatar XX: I have been to London twice

[13:26] Avatar XX: to America

[13:26] Avatar XX: you know

[13:26] Tredi Felisimo: these are professional opportunities for you

[13:26] Avatar XX: I can travel all over the world now, and never have to look for a hotel

[13:26] Avatar XX: now

[13:26] Avatar XX: that's not from selfishness or how you call it

[13:27] Avatar XX: but ther's so many ppl who invite me if I will be near them in my travels

[13:27] Avatar XX: and yes

[13:27] Avatar XX: professional opportunities are there too

[13:27] Avatar XX: omg yes!!!!

[13:27] Avatar XX: **

[13:28] Tredi Felisimo: Do you think these relationships or experiences have changed you in any way? in RL?

[13:28] Avatar XX: they have turned my life into the right direction

[13:28] Avatar XX: if it wasnt for SL I would never have completed my CD

[13:29] Avatar XX: would never have thought it to be worth to do so

[13:29] Avatar XX: and this comes from the generous support I have always experienced here in SL too

Regardless of whether virtual friends and/or lovers ever met in real life, there was often a sense of connection and community as formed and experienced in Second Life that was a very strong and important part of their lives.

Research Question 3: How Does Trust and Reciprocity in a Virtual Setting Differ from Trust and Reciprocity in Real Life, and Can it Effectively Cross Geopolitical and Cultural Boundaries to Create Social Capital via Friendships and Love Relationships?

As evidenced throughout two years of observation and interaction in the virtual world and in the words echoed in the interviews, many of the participants in the Second Life environment find rich emotional connections with fellow virtual residents. There are clear limitations inherent in traditional relationship formation including the lack of physical touch and the challenges of schedules and time zones. There are also opportunities that "exaggerate the ability to deceive" due to the ability not just to create a completely fictional persona, but to create multiple accounts under completely different virtual names and identities. "Alts," or alternative accounts are often created specifically to harass or spy on individuals, especially in the case of jilted love. Contrarily, others reported creating "alts" because their original accounts were in the virtual world for work purposes, and they wanted to be able to explore alternative lifestyles without being identified.

This ability to create and recreate an identity, remain anonymous, and come and go with very limited real life consequence creates a fertile space for exploration and for deception. However, many of the virtual residents and study participants expressed a sense of comfort in being able to express themselves openly and more honestly in the virtual world because they did not fear consequence and thus made it more real in a sense. They described ways of filtering information and of cautionary measures taken

as they worked into relationships that they felt they could trust. Ultimately, for many, there was a very fine line between virtual and real.

Strong Trust and Strong Bonds

Several examples were provided that revealed the depth of connection shared within the virtual world. For example, Avatar PP described overcoming an initial mistrust about her relationship with her virtual boyfriend that was relieved when they began using the voice feature rather than text:

> [7:00] Avatar PP: we do voice and it was a factor in our relationship in the beginning
>
> [7:01] Avatar PP: he was only willing to go so far emotionally with me until he had heard my voice and knew I was female in RL
>
> [7:01] Avatar PP: once we got over that hurdle (me really) ...we just haven't stopped
>
> [7:01] Tredi Felisimo: that's very exciting!
>
> [6:57] Avatar PP: my connection with [lover] is as intense as any I've ever had in RL. and my friends here are just as close as RL friends, but you can connect here and try things out without having to be committed here

Innate trust was also key to the development of trust in the virtual world. Even when being totally manipulated and deceived, Avatar TT described how he didn't allow that experience to influence the way he perceived his other relationships in Second Life. He said:

> [2009/11/30 17:36] Avatar TT: well - what I thought was a brilliant deaf girl dying of cancer turned out to be a sociopath guy who was just brilliant at both manipulation and presenting a very vivid persona
>
> [2009/11/30 17:37] Tredi Felisimo: OMG!
>
> [2009/11/30 17:37] Tredi Felisimo: well, you just answered the question I was writing while you were writing that!
>
> [2009/11/30 17:37] Tredi Felisimo: has that experience changed the way you look at people in SL?

[2009/11/30 17:38] Avatar TT: hard to defend against that sort of thing - but I don't even try to defend myself very hard - paranoia does more harm than good when dealing with something thatas pretty rare

[2009/11/30 17:38] Tredi Felisimo: very true TT

[2009/11/30 17:38] Avatar TT: I actually learned a lot

[2009/11/30 17:39] Avatar TT: I learned just how easy it is to be manipulated, and also just how it was done

[2009/11/30 17:39] Tredi Felisimo: Do you have less trust of others as a result?

[2009/11/30 17:39] Tredi Felisimo: I guess you already answered that too

[2009/11/30 17:40] Tredi Felisimo: but maybe a heightened awareness?

[2009/11/30 17:40] Avatar TT: yeah - a bit less naive and aware, but just as trusting

[2009/11/30 17:40] Avatar TT: afterall almost everyone has been wonderful

Avatar XX, who is a very popular figure in Second Life, also reflected on the issue of trust in the virtual world in a way one might expect friendships are also experienced in the real world. He said:

[13:12] Avatar XX: I do have a huge friendslist

[13:12] Tredi Felisimo: I'm SURE!

[13:13] Avatar XX: but there are only a handful of people who I consider to be true friends

[13:13] Avatar XX: and only 3 with who I can really go deeper in conversations

[13:14] Avatar XX: **

[13:14] Tredi Felisimo: how do you distinguish those?

[13:14] Avatar XX: wow

[13:14] Avatar XX: that may be the best question asked in a virtual world

[13:14] Tredi Felisimo: :-)

[13:14] Avatar XX: well

[13:15] Avatar XX: as I think SL is no difference to RL

[13:15] Tredi Felisimo: (btw, do you have sound on? beautiful song!)

[13:15] Tredi Felisimo: was going to ask that!

[13:15] Avatar XX: except for the boundaries wich are far less (or totally gone) in SL

[13:15] Avatar XX: it is a gutt feeling you have, just like in RL

[13:15] Tredi Felisimo: boundaries, being emotional ones?

[13:16] Avatar XX: no

[13:16] Avatar XX: not only emotional

[13:16] Avatar XX: ppl dare to do more here

[13:16] Avatar XX: like griefers

[13:16] Avatar XX: but

[13:16] Tredi Felisimo: yes!

[13:16] Avatar XX: as I said

[13:16] Avatar XX: I have seen ppl being VERY upfront in SL

[13:16] Avatar XX: and VERY!!!! shy in RL

[13:16] Avatar XX: couldn't believe it was the same person

[13:17] Tredi Felisimo: so the boundaries are more about consequences?

[13:17] Avatar XX: you can do everyting here without consequences like in RL

[13:17] Avatar XX: at least

[13:17] Avatar XX: it seems so

[13:18] Avatar XX: ppl seem to forget often that there are emotional feelings behing the keyboards as well

[13:18] Tredi Felisimo: so true!

[13:18] Tredi Felisimo: those are real consequences

[13:18] Avatar XX: consequenses are not visible as in RL

Avatar BB had a similar take on trust and relationships in this environment, explaining that it is in essence a mirror of real life:

[6:40] Avatar BB: The only true strength of a relationship here is a basis with three pillars.... Truth, Honesty, Communication. WIthout those relationships fail. **

[6:40] Avatar BB: FL or SL.**

[6:40] Tredi Felisimo: SO true Avatar BB

[6:41] Tredi Felisimo: do you think they differ in their expression or use in either world?

[6:41] Tredi Felisimo: sounds from your previous responses that you don't have much trust in them in SL?

[6:41] Avatar BB: Connections - mostly now, I speak with people on a friendly basis. Some I like more than others, but they are ones that want only friendship and have no pressures in them... thye are great. **

[6:41] Tredi Felisimo: ahhhh

[6:41] Tredi Felisimo: that's interesting also

[6:42] Avatar BB: I think many people practice deceit (for whatever reason - its irrelevant) and when we first practice to deceive, what a tangled web we weave.

[6:42] Avatar BB: **

Avatar YY expressed the same sentiment when she answered, “In terms of relationships and believing someone will follow through on their promises, sl offers a chance to ask and see a track record. I find that in rl people can deceive quite well. I am the not so proud owner of a well pump and hot water heater that cost me more than twice what it should have!”

The push and pull of trust and strength of ties in the virtual world as equal to those in the real world was also revealed when Avatar SS explained:

> [6:27] Avatar SS: oh gosh.. no, there are challenges.. but I think that if the relationship is meaningful enough for both parties it isn't really any different to RL.. in someways maybe it's less challenging as someone may want to cut contact immediately and they can do so (e.g. mute), that really just makes me look at the situation differently.. the effort we put in to maintain relationships will reflect the strength of the relationship itself.. and if it wasn't strong then what have you actually lost? you know?
>
> [6:28] Tredi Felisimo: interesting perspective!
>
> [6:29] Avatar SS: then.. my most challenging relationship was with the RL friend.. I got more insight into who she was.. and I actually didn't like it.. that created a lot of problems.. and a break, I de-friended her for a few months.. after telling her my thoughts.... she saw me RL later and sent me a text apologising and that she missed me... I forgave and we have be 're-building' since then **
>
> [6:30] Tredi Felisimo: we touched briefly already on trust.... is that a challenge and if so is it any different than trust in RL (if so why?)
>
> [6:30] Tredi Felisimo: really interesting about your RL friend... that SL was more revealing than RL!
>
> [6:30] Avatar SS: uh huh *nods*
>
> [6:30] Tredi Felisimo: glad you're rebuilding
>
> [6:32] Avatar SS: I'm really thinking hard on this one.. I'm not sure there is any difference in trust between RL and SL.. not at this point in time **

Weak Trust and No Bonds

The least trusting of the interviewees for this research mentioned on multiple occasions that she was not a trusting person by nature and was too “cautionary” to share information about herself with others. She offered, “Yes. My professional background keeps the little voice inside my head saying, ‘this avatar could be a brilliant psycho/sociopath doing time. :DD”

Research Question 4: What is Virtual Marriage? What is the Average Length of Virtual Marriage? IS the Virtual Marriage in Addition to a Real Life Marriage (Thus extramarital)? How many of these virtual marriages preceded real life marriages? How does virtual marriage affect real life attitudes toward marriage and real life family social capital?

Virtual marriage – reality or fantasy

The concept of marriage in Second Life carries many different meanings with no way to statistically track how many relationships form and dissolve "officially." One of the study participants gave the following example:

> [12:51] DonJuan Writer: there have been a few connections that have actually changed me
>
> [12:51] DonJuan Writer: an angry, deaf, muslim woman
>
> [12:52] DonJuan Writer: a guy with a form of autism
>
> [12:52] DonJuan Writer: I was "married" to a girl with aspbergers, just because she asked me to marry her
>
> [12:53] Tredi Felisimo: Did you have feelings for the woman you "married"?
>
> [12:54] DonJuan Writer: no
>
> [12:54] DonJuan Writer: she had asked me within fifteen minutes of first meeting and at that stage I just saw it as an interesting development
>
> [12:54] DonJuan Writer: trying to talk to her was a problem

As previously discussed, "partnering" with someone is one way to express a public bond with another in Second Life. Some people consider partnership as the equivalent to a marriage, where others relate it more as nothing more than an expression of commitment. On the other hand, the wedding business is a thriving industry in Second Life. A "search" of "weddings" in-world in March, 2010 yielded approximately 1,000 results. Partnership does not require a wedding, and a wedding does not require partnership. Still others may secretly refer to themselves as married

and carry on as a married couple in the virtual world, while they have completely separate lives (often including spouses and children) in their real lives.

Although many individuals claim that they find attraction to individuals in Second Life is based on their perception of their romantic interests' "authentic" personalities, some avatar experience would indicate otherwise. When making the leap from fantasy to reality, some interviewees expressed surprise when reality didn't match the visual fantasy. For instance, Avatar UU and Avatar MM reflected on their experiences of meeting a virtual friend in real life:

> Avatar UU: he swore my age was not an issue… but I think it interfered with his fantasy, knowing the truth**
>
> [13:06] Avatar MM: I think the most interesting was the person I worked for came to NY to meet me
>
> [13:07] Avatar MM: and we have so mmuch chemistry on Sl and ithink none in person
>
> [13:07] Avatar MM: that was fascinating to me because up until that point whever it was in Sl translated in Rl and vice versa
>
> [13:07] Avatar MM: **
>
> [13:08] Tredi Felisimo: That is really fascinating!
>
> [13:09] Tredi Felisimo: Shows how much of chemistry is visual for some
>
> [13:09] Avatar MM: I think in that case I might have been enamored withthe av and less withthe person though i enjoy his company in either life his sex appeal relates better in Sl though our relationship is not romantic or sexual
>
> [13:09] Avatar MM: yes
>
> [13:10] Avatar MM: he is a man of color in Sl and causcasion in Rl

Avatar MM found that taking the steps of using voice and sharing her real life image via Skype drew judgmental comparisons between her avatar and her real look:

[12:55] Avatar MM: this is my main account

[12:55] Avatar MM: my alt is inthe group you sent you message in about the research

[12:56] Avatar MM: I think sahring my image with people is the thinkg that produces the most anxiety

[12:56] Tredi Felisimo: even now, as you begin the integration?

[12:56] Avatar MM: I can talk on voice and skype etc. but as soon as i compare the actual me with my sl me I get a little freaked but I do it anyway**

[12:57] Avatar MM: yeah cause i am very heavy in RL so we differ in that aspect and think people expec me to look the same since my personality in SL is "real"

[12:57] Avatar MM: **

Although these responses reflect the value placed on the visual impressions of the avatar and the loss of fantasy and thus attraction when transitioning to real life, most of the people interviewed who had met Second Life friends in real life indicated that meeting the person only enhanced their feelings or impressions of them. Not having to "deal with reality" in virtual relationships is also recognized by many avatars as part of the attraction. In the virtual world there are no clothes to wash, houses to clean, toilet seats to put down, crying babies or many of the other mundane issues that may come between couples in daily life. Such was the conversation that took place at one of the SL/RL Relationships discussions as the avatars exchanged banter:

[19:27] Uns Mistwalker: Cognac, you never have to deal with socks on the floor in SL!

[19:27] Jayda Ferrentino: hahaha

[19:27] CognacLady Boxen: I think we do....we open up more because of the anonoymous cloud of the internet.....we can put ourselves out there more

[19:28] CognacLady Boxen: no - you don't Uns....your SL relations can be "perfect" so consequently.....you get closer emotionally**

As discussed earlier, many of the study participants as well as those observed over time revealed that their Second Life relationships were outside of their real life marriages. Five of the interviewees (20 percent) either had or were having extramarital relationships via their online love lives. The issue of online affairs also frequently raised the question of whether or not it was “cheating” if the individuals participating in the online love never met in real life.

Extramarital Relationships

The question of cheating or adultery was often discussed in the SL/RL Relationships discussions as there was not a universal agreement on what qualifies as adultery. This issue was raised during many of the discussions with some carrying a strong stand that if one shares “intimacy” with another without the knowledge of a spouse, it is cheating. Others argued that it is possible and acceptable to love more than one as long as there is open and honest communication with everyone involved in the relationships. The following discussion makes this point:

[19:21] Jayda Ferrentino: what about cheating emotionally

[19:21] Havik Luckless: i don't think so, how can you be in a rl relationship and tell someone else you love them?**

[19:21] Jayda Ferrentino: is it cheating

[19:21] Wytchwhisper Sadofsky: no acu but poligamy isnt an evil thing momons did it

[19:21] Arianna Barbarossa: yes it is cheating jayda

[19:21] Acuminous Watanabe: "feelings" Avatar EE... or SEX... feelings surely can't be enough... LAWD! knows I would EAT Larenz Tate if he visits my dreams tonight!**

[19:21] Jayda Ferrentino: but who hasn't thought of somebody else

[19:21] Jayda Ferrentino: in a physical sense or emotional sense

[19:22] Wytchwhisper Sadofsky: well joseph smith had to to populate the colony

[19:22] Uns Mistwalker: Right, Jayda...there's some line there**

[19:22] Havik Luckless: thinking and interacting w/ someone daily are 2 different things

[19:22] Jayda Ferrentino: i think so too

[19:22] Jayda Ferrentino: oh wait, interacting

[19:22] Jayda Ferrentino: well

[19:22] Uns Mistwalker: But many are devasted by a partner's 'emotional affair' when no sex is involved.

[19:23] Wytchwhisper Sadofsky: u can love more than one person thats why peeps get confused an feel torn between 2 people at times**

Among this study's interviewees who were willing to openly discuss their extramarital experiences, two of them discussed their acceptance that the relationship would potentially remain virtual without end as well as in addition to the real life marriages involved:

[7:11] Avatar PP: they are my day to day experince. and [lover] is the best man I have ever known, so that is in a class by tiself

[7:11] Tredi Felisimo: If you could transition your partnership in SL to RL, do you think that's something you'd want? I realize that may be something that evolves and you may not know the answer to that yet.

[7:12] Avatar PP: for now it isn't. and he is not situated for that to happen, which is fine with me. in two years? I have no idea

[7:12] Avatar PP: his situation is part of what made it easier for me to open up to him

[7:13] Tredi Felisimo: knowing that he wasn't available in RL?

[7:13] Avatar PP: yes

[7:13] Avatar PP: though we do joke about it - he does more than i do - and I know he has times when he wants that to happen

[7:14] Tredi Felisimo: do you think you could live "happily ever after" in SL without a RL transition?

[7:14] Tredi Felisimo: (seems some are able to do that)

[7:14] Avatar PP: right now I do. he speaks about years form now. he is slowly making abliever out of me

While Avatar PP is single and in a relationship with a married lover, Avatar RR is married in real life and has extramarital relationships in Second Life. She explained that she cares for her real life husband who suffers from early onset dementia. She lives in the mountains in a remote location with no friends or family near and is unable to drive at night.

[13:00] Avatar RROh: [husband] is used to me being on line..after 11 years.. does he know... what it all is... no.. and I would never tell him.... I believe.... that if you have an affair.. in any world.... its your choice.. and you keep it to yourself... to tell.. is putting that burdon on your partner... .and they have no need to know.. *

And finally, Avatar EE reported coming into Second Life after his wife had revealed her online affairs and convinced him that he should explore his own relationships as well. He wrote:

"oh..yeah..that was so lonely....I needed it..I don't have that in my RL.. I think ever since XXXX [his RL wife] started 2 years ago with finding romance and sex in SL...I've been getting less and less in my RL...till now it's nothing.. I can't be celebate.. and I've found that SL sex is just as good.. the feeling of love..I need that also. Love without sex some kind of way is empty..I mean in any romance..

"I really believe that this virtual world will change the way people view love. It certainly is a way to fulfilled many dreams of love people miss in their Real Lives. XXXX [his RL wife] and I know that too well."

Builder and Destroyer of Family Social Capital

As Avatar EE described his challenges in his real life marriage, he also discussed repeatedly that there was nothing more important to him than his wife and that they agreed that they would continue to experience sex and romance in Second Life outside their marriage but never meet those loves in real life. They were polyamorous individuals experiencing multiple love lives virtually while remaining monogamous in real life. Participants in the SL/RL Relationships discussions are very open about expressing the conflicts they experience between real life and Second Life in their marriages:

19:32] XXXX: My hub doesn't get it AT ALL, but tolerates it and me!**

19:33] Chan Dejavu: my hubby dos not get this either...but I dont get Madden, so I guess were even**

19:33] Tredi Felisimo: there ya go!!!

19:33] Tredi Felisimo: lol

19:33] Audri Porterfield: yes i tolerate it bbut when you start putting sl obver rl there's a problem!!!

19:28] Audri Porterfield: well i'm married and my husband has been on here for a while and sometimes he gets into the whole sl way too much.....he's always on voice talking to women/friends how would that make you feel? HIm and his friends have been trying to get me on for a while i signed up back in April and i still can't seem to get into this!!!

19:33] Audri Porterfield: yes i tolerate it bbut when you start putting sl obver rl there's a problem!!!

19:33] Tredi Felisimo: Agreed Audri

19:33] Tredi Felisimo: there has to be balance!**

19:34] Dracona Thor: over a rl relationship YES I agree

19:34] Audri Porterfield: exactly

19:34] Audri Porterfield: my point

19:34] Chan Dejavu: it happens ALL the time tho**

19:34] Teague Wirefly: yes - and balance ends up being hard for me here.... i really enjoy my time here... and have made some great friends**

19:34] Audri Porterfield: a balance

19:34] Allellia Zebberman: lol....think it adds balance to my rl relationship

19:34] Dracona Thor: agreed teague

19:35] Audri Porterfield: ture @ allellia an outlet

19:35] Audri Porterfield: but!!!

19:35] Allellia Zebberman: my rl partner is such an oppisite

19:35] Audri Porterfield: you need that balance or you'll be alone

19:36] Allellia Zebberman: it is refreshing to have a conversation etc here

19:37] Teague Wirefly: yes - well - being here has helped me to remember that I CAN be a sexy, attractive, wanted woman.**

19:37] Dracona Thor: agreed teague me too

19:37] Dracona Thor: my rl confidence increased directly due to my sl experience

These individuals discuss both the positive and negative impacts their Second Life relationships have on their real lives both individually and interpersonally. While participants may get caught up in the emotions and drama of relationships, some talk about the separation between real and virtual as though the computer is like a television or a book where, if you don't like the way the story is going, you turn it off or stop reading:

[7:05] Avatar DD: the breaks do negatively impact my RL

[7:05] Tredi Felisimo: ok

[7:05] Avatar DD: because of the emotional casualty

[7:06] Tredi Felisimo: can't turn that off, for sure

[7:06] Avatar DD: i am sad..or angry..or irritable

[7:06] Avatar DD: but

[7:06] Tredi Felisimo: always amazed when people say, all you have to do is "click quit"

[7:06] Avatar DD: yeah if you can only do that with emotions

[7:06] Tredi Felisimo: no off button on our emotions

[7:06] Tredi Felisimo: lol

[7:07] Avatar DD: but on a positive note

[7:07] Avatar DD: which each lousey person I meet in SL... i have found a greater appreciation for ppl in my RL

[7:07] Tredi Felisimo: awesome!

[7:07] Tredi Felisimo: lol

[7:07] Avatar DD: and this is especailyl true of my realtionship w men her and my husband

[7:07] Avatar DD: here

[7:07] Tredi Felisimo: very interesting

[7:08] Tredi Felisimo: so that's a positive effect

Another positive behavioral change Second Life relationships had on one 69-year-old interviewee's real life relationships was revealed when he said:

[17:39] Avatar OO: Yes, I feel easier talking with strangers in RL now that I have done so with many in SL

[17:40] Avatar OO: Huggin was a no-no until I did many hugs in SL

Still, there are negative consequences as well. Since the conclusions of the interviews for this study, two of the 25 participants have reported that their real life marriages were separating or getting divorced, citing either time spent online or their Second Life relationships as central to the breakup of their marriages.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

> Reflection Freenote: Do we tend to approach novel situations and creative challenges with greater enthusiasm in SL, than in RL? Is this because we are better aware that they are not "life and death" encounters for our avatars? If so, our perception of reality is more accurate in SL than in RL.

Conclusions

Throughout the course of history, some of the most profound shifts in human culture emerged as a result of innovation in communications. Consider the profound impacts that the printing press, radio, and television had on how we were able to share information and to be entertained. Since the early studies of communications, grounded in social science theory, communication scientists have followed the changing nature of the flow of communication as the world shifted from one limited to interpersonal communication, to a world with tools that provided a source of one-to-many and more recently in the circular flow envisioned by Wiener's cybernetic theory.

With the advent of the Internet, not only how, but also why people use media are changing yet again. This research expands our knowledge and understanding of the Internet as a mass medium that provides a voice and a place not only for the interpersonal exchange of information, but also as an environment where information can be distributed both locally and globally, and in a way that allows anyone to be the originator of the content. It has also created a new "community" that is no longer bound by geography, but creates links between people of all nations, ages, races, genders, religiosities, philosophies and interests. No longer is information creation and distribution restricted to the agenda setters and gatekeepers. Rather, everyone with access to a computer or cell phone and an Internet connection has the ability to share their thoughts, words, art and ideas; to become the content creator and a mass

distributor of their message or their craft.

Taking the impact of the medium one step further, one of the newest features of online communication is the ability to enter a 3-D immersive environment where the interaction is enhanced by the power of presence. This research revealed powerful effects of computer mediated communication in the development of digital social capital as created and maintained in the online 3-D immersive world using Second Life as the platform of study. The study participants often revealed a willingness to ignore the "noise" that might be traditionally found in mass communication signals and accept the information they were receiving as authentic. This response may be considered a form of escapism that mirrors the "willing suspension of disbelief" that has traditionally been accepted when watching film or television, or even reading a book.

The growing popularity of online virtual worlds not only for gaming and entertainment, but also for work, education, and cultural exchange demands a better understanding of the influence it has on the way messages are sent and received. This platform is, in essence, a mass medium that blends both mass and interpersonal communication, and thus challenges us to reconsider mass communication theory not because it only flows from one-to-many, but also because it offers an interactive tool that replicates one of the most powerful forms of information exchange and yet the most primitive: word-of-mouth.

However, without gatekeepers, who is responsible for the quality or authenticity of source when the Internet provides the veil of anonymity to the originator of the message? And what impact does it have on the receivers? Take, for example, the inherent conflict in this medium as operators must function between the virtual and the real. Because the "residents" of this environment are virtual representations of humans,

they may or may not reflect fundamental truths about their real-life identities such as age, race or gender. Yet, as this study revealed, people are interacting, exchanging goods and services, even falling in love with these virtual beings. In the 3-D virtual world, presence often adds strength to the perception of reality making information exchange even more dynamic. This study affirms both positive and negative impacts inherent in the ability to create a space of powerful engagement between individuals as well as a place of sometimes devastating deception.

Although there were horror stories of being lied to in intimate relationships in the virtual world or of being taken advantage of, similar to the perils of both real life and Internet activity, perhaps one of the most surprising results of the interviews conducted as part of the digital ethnography was a willingness to trust a virtual person. In an era of decline in social capital resulting from the deterioration of trust in our neighbors, co-workers, religious, civic and political leaders (Putnam, 2000), the participants in this study reported a willingness to trust their virtual counterparts equally (40 percent) or greater (32 percent) in this environment as they do in their real-life environment, and they often felt as close to or closer to their virtual friends or communities than their real life contacts. As one interviewee explained, “Due to the security and anonymity here, [trust] is easier I guess. Well, people online are simply more open with their feelings, and what is the risk?” This “lack of risk” or perceived real-life consequences was commonly cited as the reason individuals operated in the virtual realm in a way they described as “more authentic” than they would in their real lives.

As Ridings, Gefen and Arinze (2002) found that there are different types of information that people are willing to share, the element of trust in Second Life was based on the idea that the individuals could reveal their inner-most feelings and secrets

because the person with whom they were sharing the information would never know their real-life identity. The psychological implications of this finding were evident when one of the study participants revealed very intimate details very early in the interview. The researcher enlisted the support of an "expert other" to analyze the interview transcripts to validate the findings, a real-life clinical psychologist known as Reflection Freenote in Second Life who summarized:

> It is notable that he opened up in the first 15 minutes with enormously private information about childhood abuse, and severe behavioral pathology "cutting" which would be very unusual (very unusual) even in a face-to-face psychotherapeutic encounter, where people routinely take many sessions to get comfortable enough to do that even with a therapist.

Specifically, this research attempted to answer first, what were the motivations for participation or use of the virtual world, and as such, how the presentation of "self" and perceptions of others' influences trust. Additionally, this study explored if and how people are able to exchange resources (whether physical or emotional), and as a result are able to create bonding, bridging or maintaining ties, even in the form of a virtual marriage. Finally, this study probed those relationships and identified how they impacted real-life relationships.

Research Question 1: What are the Uses and Gratifications of Individuals in Second Life?

Nearly two years of immersed experience in Second Life as a participant observer provided insights to the nature of the digital culture in its many forms. In this virtual world, individuals recreate a real world space or a total fantasy environment, but it is one that provides 24-hour access to anyone they choose from anywhere in the world via virtual presence. As such, the environment is not bound by geography, physics, or cultural norms, thus it creates the potential for unlimited uses both personally and professionally. The results of this study strongly aligned with process-oriented

gratifications of Internet use that reveal social, entertainment and escape motivations including Social and Entertainment gratifications (Stafford and Stafford, 2001), Escapism and Socialization (Korgaonkar and Wolin), and Companionship, Interpersonal Communication, Escape and Interaction (Lin, 2000 and 2001). Likewise, because Second Life is a 3-D online immersive environment that is designed as both a work and a social space rather than a video game (and thus does not have goals such as winning or losing as motivation), individuals enter this virtual world to satisfy Charney and Greenberg's (2002) gratification factors of being informed, communication and career. In fact, one of the most significant findings of this study was that among the interviewees, the average age was almost 49, and 80 percent had either undergraduate or advanced degrees and sought interaction in Second Life for the intellectual stimulation. These demographics do not fit the stereotype "gamer" that is often represented in popular press dominated by youth, young male adults, or social outcasts. The study participants did not report participating in other online games such as *Doom, World of Warcraft*, or *Grand Theft Auto* clearly delineating this 3-D virtual world from the online game environments.

Entertainment and creativity were also identified among the participants as dominant motivations for participation in the virtual world. However, escapism was found in tandem with entertainment, creativity and social interaction as some of the individuals in the environment exist in the virtual world as an augmented reality, maintaining an entirely separate identity than their real lives as a form of entertainment, creative expression or to experience relationships with others.

The key themes that emerged from the results of this research aligned with social gratifications were not only social interaction, but also the development of sexual and

romantic relationships. More than half of the study participants (60 percent) reported having been involved romantically with another virtual resident, four of whom (16 percent) reported their relationships were extramarital.

Information, Entertainment, and Creativity

The themes of information/learning/intellectual growth, entertainment and creativity were widely discussed, as Second Life provides a multitude of events from business training, discussions of virtually any topic including history, literature, spirituality and philosophy, and self-help seminars to name a few. Likewise there are hundreds of live music events daily, poetry readings, and social venues similar to bars or clubs where people gather at every hour of the day. The creative element, although not as frequently cited, was an important draw to some residents who have discovered how to create environments, clothing, residences, objects, and animations that they use either for themselves or to sell to others.

As previously mentioned, the age and education levels of the average participant in this virtual environment, compounded with the desire to seek information and intellectual growth, are creating opportunity for new forms of information delivery. If exploring this environment through the lens of Rogers' theory of diffusion of innovation (1995), user growth, retraction and stabilization in the past six years would indicate that this virtual world has survived Gartner's pro-innovation bias and the "trough of disillusionment," and currently is in the slope of enlightenment. Other indicators that the virtual world could be reaching mass adoption as identified through participant observation is the recent growth of converged media events that feature mainstream media representatives (See Figure 5-1) and corporate training programs. For example, Virtually Speaking is an in-world group that hosts a live program twice per week,

typically featuring nationally acclaimed journalists or current political figures. The discussions are streamed live on the Internet as well and are open for discussion at the end of each interview.

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* *

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4. Retweet staff or tweet with #VirtuallySpeaking
http://twitter.com/jayackroyd
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Figure 5-1. Virtually Speaking group announcement in Second Life

These process-oriented gratifications also are consistent with Song et al (2004) who found the similarity between television use and Internet use. However, while television, films, and even literature provide a story that is authored, produced and delivered for the consumer to view with the story complete, in Second Life, the "viewers" are active participants in creating the story. In essence their virtual self was a character in the story that they were creating through their participation. Much like the parasocial interaction that Horton and Wohl (1956) defined as the bond between the real person and a fictional character, interaction in the online immersive world becomes more complex as the "character" with whom the person is interacting is also a living human on another keyboard, responding in real time. For many of the study participants, there was little distinction between virtual and real or between what might be a fantasy story to one, yet a real-life experience to another. As one person explained, "It's life in the mind." This finding is also consistent with the conclusions of Reeves and Nass (1996) who as a result of their study of social responses to communication technologies concluded that "individuals' interactions with computers, television, and new media are

fundamentally social and natural, just like interactions in real life" (p. 5). These experiences can have profound impact on individuals as they often related their virtual experiences as *life* experiences even if that experience took place in a role play environment and in something other than "human" form. This revelation creates important direction in psychological study to better understand the potential power of this medium, consistent with the research that discovered children's false acquisition of memory based on their virtual experience (Segovia and Bailenson, 2009). Again, the line between virtual and real is blurred especially in terms of memory, much like awakening from a dream and not being certain if the dream was real or imagined.

Exploration of Self

Previous research in Internet uses and gratifications did not identify the exploration of self as a motivation; however, this research found it played a dominant role in the use of the virtual environment. This exploration was defined by the researcher as either an experience as an "immersive self" or an "integrated/augmented self." Those who experience their virtual lives as immersed selves were those who created personas that existed uniquely in the virtual setting -- lives that were fully immersed in the virtual world as separate beings than their real selves. The integrated/augmented participants were those who brought their real life identities into the virtual realm and experienced the virtual world as an extension of their real lives.

How people identify with themselves as a virtual being is of significant importance to the future use of 3-D virtual environments for business and education purposes. If, in fact, organizations want to function in the virtual setting, they will need to determine whether individuals can participate with or without real-life identifiers. This is important, for example, if companies or organizations want to invite those individuals "from the

edges" to participate and collaborate in planning and problem resolution. Based on the results of this research, allowing employees to participate in this environment in a corporate dialog anonymously would break the spiral of silence and potentially foster creative thought. On the other hand, true anonymity would also invite the potential of disruptive and potentially destructive behavior, given the knowledge that there would be no possibility of consequence.

Although one of the research questions asked about presentation of self specificially to better understand how that presentation of self influenced their bond with others, the results revealed that identity exploration was more of a consequence of being in the virtual world rather than an expectation or reason to create a virtual persona. One of the most interesting discoveries about identity exploration was that the residents often didn't necessarily come into the world to "try out a different side" of themselves; rather, they may have come to the world because of work or a recommendation from a colleague. However, many of the study participants found that once they were in Second Life, they found that they could explore their identity in what was often called a "safe" environment not with an intent to deceive others, but as a way of more openly expressing themselves in ways they may not feel comfortable in their real lives. Safe is often defined as one in which they perceive the environment to be without real life consequences because they can simply log off (like closing the book or turning off the television) or, in more extreme cases, delete an avatar account, create a new one, and begin again under an entirely new identity with complete anonymity. Likewise, these individuals were exposed to lifestyles (such as the gorean or bondage sub-cultures) that are often considered deviant in real life but that they might be drawn

to and could explore without perceived real life consequences including public humiliation, becoming outcast, or suffering job loss, divorce, or relationship dissolution.

One avatar offered an intriguing perspective in his real life profile which read, “Started for me as a social experiment. How do people treat you when you are not handsome? It has been an education. When asked about it, he responded:

> XXXX: (Saved Wed Mar 17 23:36:21 2010) you must be speaking about my "experiment" Haha, well it was very very educational. It allowed me to experience the world from another person's prospective. It changed the way I live in RL. I know this will sound odd, but I take a little of XXXX with me into RL.
>
> XXXX: the expereince was so profound I thought about writing about it in my blog
>
> XXXX: it has been over 3years now, but the lessons learned effect me to this day

In addition to identity exploration, these virtual residents may seek the interaction for the sake of friendship, kinship, or romance as either a supplement to their real lives and in some cases as a replacement. As was discussed with a number of interviewees, they prefer their Second Lives to their real lives. As Avatar CC wrote:

> [17:19] Avatar CC: i do...like i said, i'm immersed...much prefer the world of SL to my boring r/l one
>
> [17:19] Tredi Felisimo: Don't think you're alone there!
>
> [17:19] Avatar CC: no, there are other addicts lol

As stated previously, many of the study participants report that their virtual experience is very real. The interviewees often reminded the researcher that the actions of the avatar are driven by the human at the keyboard, and as such cannot be separated from their real emotions. Some Second Life residents refer to real life as “First Life.” As one explained, “I now see your point in calling it First Life, as the Second Life experience is by no means completely unReal.” Another wrote in his avatar profile,

“sl and rl are one and the same - only divided by asymmetric information, a monitor screen and usually a fair few miles.”

Experiencing virtual as real has serious psychological, sociological and philosophical implications that echo back in mass media to classic films such as *Blade Runner (1982)* and more recently *The Matrix (1999), Surrogates* (2009) and *Avatar (2010).* The recurrent themes in those films were escapism; the weakness of the human mind and a willingness to sacrifice real life for virtuality to avoid painful realities of everyday life. When the virtual residents reported the desire of the immersed experience and the preference to reside in the virtual world rather than the real world, one must consider the real-life consequences that mimic addiction issues. As Avatar CC joked, addiction is a very real potential problem for several of the study participants both observed and interviewed. This consequence of online activity is consistent with the warnings of Nie (2002) and Kraut, et al. (1998) who feared the decline of one’s family time and strength of social connection in the real world; however, these individuals may be replacing their real life connections with virtual ones. What is not known is what value these connections have in an individuals’ quality of life or happiness, and whether these individuals are able to balance real and virtual. Although anecdotally “people knew people who” had lost everything as a result of their obsession with their virtual life, none of the participants in this research had experienced it personally.

Sexual and Romantic Relationships

The results of this study add to prior research regarding Internet uses and gratifications of interaction, socialization, and companionship but in addition to the relatively new phenomenon of online relationship formation. Of the sample of 25

interviewees, 15 had been “partnered” in Second Life, or what is considered by most a form of virtual marriage. Of the 10 who had not been partnered, many of them discussed having sexual or deeply romantic relationships with virtual lovers. Avatars participating in this study revealed that “real” virtual life may also be acted out in a fantasy setting such as the role play or themed sims where avatars can take on any number of fantasy forms. For many, they feel as though they are “living out their fantasy” much like becoming the character in a romance novel or television drama. And, for many, that fantasy is in the form of sexual and romantic relationships. However, these relationships aren’t necessarily exclusively fantasy. One of the interviewees was married in real life to her Second Life partner and two others indicated an interest or intent to meet their Second Life partner in real life, with a possibility of real life marriage.

With the growth of online dating sites such as Match.com and eHarmony, virtual worlds such as Second Life also appear to be another “place” where people meet and experience romantic attachment with the enhanced opportunity to create a lifestyle together including virtual cohabitation, marriage and family formation. In fact, it is possible to purchase a scripted HUD for a female avatar that creates the experience of pregnancy and childbirth. For example, while wearing the HUD, the avatar will see random messages appear in the local “chat” that explains where she is in gestation, what the virtual fetus is experiencing developmentally at that point in gestation, and what lifestyle choices she should make such as the nutrition the mother needs to adequately feed the growing fetus. The virtual mother-to-be must meet with a virtual doctor during the gestation of the virtual child for pre-natal check-ups and she has a

choice of hospital or home birth. Even having the water break is scripted in this experience.

Having known several women who made the choice to experience virtual pregnancy and childbirth, the researcher observed emotional mood swings in these women. These swings included the exhilaration of childbirth and the equivalent of post-partum depression in one. Family life educators and psychologists could further explore the use of this technology for pre-marital counseling as well as parent education curriculum.

Research Question 2 – Presentation of Self and Development of Trust and Reciprocity Based on the Virtual Self

Whether perceived as real or fantasy, people interact with others in their own way. The second research question addressed this presentation of self, and how it influenced the ability to generate trust and create bonds of any significance with others in the virtual world. For example, if a person is a 60-year-old male in real life but is representing himself as a 24-year-old female avatar, can a true relationship be developed? Among the people encountered via participant observation as well as those interviewed, only one revealed such an experience (although anecdotally, such an experience is reported as not so uncommon). Avatar TT had fallen in love with a dying woman only to discover it was a healthy male in real life. Yet, when asked how that experience changed him, he described himself as "a bit less naïve and aware, but just as trusting. After all almost everyone has been wonderful." His response brings light to Turkle's (1997) explanation of online self as one that "exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time," and that participants in this study had often come to accept their virtual counterparts as role players and trusted only the "truth" of that role in

that place and in that point in time.

The study participants often spoke of trust as a potential problem but also revealed that in most cases, as mentioned previously, they tend to trust equally if not more in the virtual world as they do people in the real world. They recognize that deceit is easy to achieve and have found ways to either accept the truths as presented in Second Life as no more than what exists in the virtual world, or to find ways to build trust in the same way it is done in real life, over time. They also identified methods they had found effective in building trust, the most simple of which was to speak to each other using the voice feature to establish confirmation of gender and as a sense of "hearing authenticity" in voice.

Yet, others reported that they chose not to use voice for a number of reasons. For instance, one person indicated that he didn't care for the sound of his voice and had always felt judged by his accent. Another participant explained that she felt that some people are more effective at manipulating emotions with the tone of their voices and preferred the use of written word to convey more meaningful emotion. Other methods used to gain trust were sharing information that extended beyond the virtual world including photos, real life contact information, and talking to each other on webcam. Still, two interviewees indicated that they would trust no one in the virtual world under any circumstance, one of whom also indicated she was not likely to trust anyone in the real world.

These methods of determining what or who to trust and how to trust are important to tease out with the rampant worry of online deception in all virtual settings including social networking sites and virtual worlds. For the most part, the participants who had spent significant time in the virtual setting had adapted to the environment by creating a

personal system of checks and balances and setting personal limits on their expectations of “authenticity” in the virtual environment. Overwhelmingly, the study participants were guarded with their real life identification information but were willing to reveal their personal thoughts, dreams, and challenges with their virtual friends and loved ones.

Perhaps one of the most startling discoveries of this research was the power of the media effects on the way individuals approached “visual identity” in real life as a result of looking past virtual appearances to discover the personalities of their virtual peers. As revealed in the findings about representation of virtual self, several of the study participants indicated that they now see people differently in real life based on their experiences with virtual beings in Second Life (such as the woman who sees her sister as both human and “nekko” and the professor who now “listens” to the student with dreadlocks rather than passing judgment based on his appearance). This is a truly extraordinary shift in values systems that could be applied to the understanding of visual discrimination and to such problems facing our cultures as negative self body image. As communicators have long attempted to “create image” and understand the power of visual images, these results speak to the potential to development of image based on action more powerfully that looks.

These findings extend prior research on the formation of “self” as well as the perception of “other” in online multi-user domains (MUDs) in the 2-D web such as websites, blogs and social networking sites which have drawn from the symbolic interactionist perspective. Robinson (2007) posited, “Like offline self-ing, cyberselfing is rooted in interaction as understood by Mead (1934); the ‘I,’ the ‘me’ and the ‘generalized

other' inform each other as the core of the self-ing project" (p. 107). This research confirms the role of interaction in the development of image in more meaningful ways.

Research Question 3 – Can Trust and Reciprocity Create Social Capital Across Geopolitical and Cultural Boundaries?

As trust is established in the virtual world, relationships are also formed in very meaningful ways. The findings of this research are consistent with the work of Barraket and Henry-Waring (2008) who found that individuals who participated in online networks placed equal or greater value on their online friendships than their real-life friends, and that the Internet "overcomes the tyranny of distance." Twenty of the interviewees, 16 (64 percent), indicated they felt their friendships and Second Life relationships were more meaningful than their real life relationships; seven (28 percent) reported that their Second Life relationships were similar or equal to their real life relationships; and two (8 percent) reported that their virtual relationships were shallow and less significant than their real life relationships.

These results add strength to understanding the evolution and complexity of "community" as it is less and less defined geographically or by cultural traditions. The ties that once bound us to kin networks and neighbors have weakened as the ties to communities of interest strengthen. Is this a positive or negative impact on culture? From a mass communication perspective, this shift would lead one to believe that it would make it more difficult to engage individuals in their local or civic community; yet, recent studies have found that those individuals more actively involved online are also more actively involved in their civic communities (Pew, 2010). As the generators of news and information, mass communication professionals need to continue to identify how and why people align with causes and communities and reach them in ways that they will trust. As Negroponte (1995) warned about the concept of "The Daily Me,"

people appear to be drawn to the source that fits their beliefs rather than seek out information that challenges them.

However, this research also reveals interesting insight into what may be a trend toward the value placed on interpersonal communication, even when the interaction is with an unknown virtual source. This is almost a reverse phenomenon than the one seen during World War I when soldiers on a remote island who had been friends one day became enemies simply with the arrival of the newspapers that informed them they were supposed to be enemies and at war.

Study participants cited the ease of communication, feeling more free to speak openly and honestly, exposure to people of other cultures, finding people with like-minds or similar interests, and a lack of real life issues that often complicate relationships as powerful influences in the development of the strength of ties. There was also a frequent mention of the ability to communicate with people of all nations, ages, cultures, languages, and genders without judgment of stereotypes. One Second Life avatar real life profile read:

> I desire to be accepted in SL without the prejudice of RL details. SL is a chance to break from our social and cultural trance. It's a chance to allow consciousness to develop, grow, and blossom.

This sentiment was echoed in the words of one interviewee who explained:

> [18:06] Avatar OO: Yes, it is clear that the Internet as a whole has begun leveling the world
>
> [18:06] Avatar OO: Sl has allowed insights into other cultures that open eyes to the possibilities of diverse harmony
>
> [18:07] Tredi Felisimo: Do you think it's changing the way we communicate in general?
>
> [18:07] Tredi Felisimo: in good or bad ways?

[18:07] Avatar OO: Yes, for example in China, the Internet users are rebelling against governmental censorship and buidling rebellion in other ares too

[18:08] Avatar OO: Some people are beginnning to see how people live and relate in the US and want that in theri own countries too

[18:08] Avatar OO: The changes are good

[18:08] Tredi Felisimo: I hope so OO

[18:08] Avatar OO: They are small steps to a world of greater peace

The words of Avatar OO and others reflect the general consensus of a sense of leveling experienced in the avatar life. Although there are some individuals who create outrageous or ugly avatars for the sake of experimentation or to garner attention, the average avatar is very young, fit, and attractive. Although it does require some financial resources to make an avatar more attractive with more realistic skin, hair, and fashionable clothing, even the basic free shapes and accessories are, by most standards, attractive. Likewise, an individual's personality is often seen through the written word thus also eliminating judgment of voice or accents. Certainly, the results of this study support the development of hierarchy in the virtual culture that can still be influenced by fiscal resources and by the element of "celebrity." However, in this environment, power and influence is afforded more to those who are able to manage relationships through words and actions and are not as influenced by appearances as in the real world.

As discussed in the findings regarding presentation of self, without traditional visual and auditory values, there was a sense among the people studied, that in the virtual world, individuals are experiencing another's thoughts, feelings, and personality more genuinely and as such are being "judged by the book, not the cover." This experience is also changing the laws of attraction as the traditional filters are not there.

When reporting on relationship experience and romance in Second Life, many residents referenced this sense of "falling in love with the person's spirit" rather than other more traditional variables. The results of this study confirm Bargh and McKenna (2004) who found that the "relative anonymity aspect encourages self-expression, and the relative absence of physical and nonverbal interaction cues (e.g. attractiveness) facilitates the formations of relationships on other, deeper bases such as shared values and beliefs" (p. 586).

Research Question 4: What is the Affect of this Medium on Intimate Relationships

The final question posed in this study sought to understand the concept of virtual marriage and its impact on real life marriage. The results of this research strengthen our understanding of the idea that media multiplexity leads to stronger personal connections. Likewise, the connections and collaboration created in the medium add rigor to the notion of Ascott's (1990) "coherence in the global brain." The interviewees reported creating powerful bonds with friends and colleagues around the world that were very important to them. They also reported experiencing deeply emotional romantic experiences that developed very rapidly and often dissolved equally rapidly.

Again, these results point to the theoretical framework of parasocial interaction, and mimic the sense of exhilaration that is experienced when one projects an ideal of romance on an unattainable object of affection. Also consider, for example, the popularity of reality television programs "The Bachelor" and "The Bachelorette" and of television dramas that highlight romance. The sense of voyeur culture that identifies with the romanticized ideal of "love at first sight" is combined with power of the animated images in idealized settings and a powerful element of presence.

Virtual marriages in Second Life are often the equivalent of a romantic television vignette where a couple is swept off their feet in a romantic setting and discovers their "soul mate" as they reveal their most intimate secrets. However, as the intensity of new love settles, they often discover there is no depth to the connection and move on. The power of the medium can be deceiving as these individuals experience that sense of "idealized self" and project how they'd like to be in their relationships. As evidenced in the interviews and as explained in the discussion of the exploration of self in what is considered a "safe" environment these individuals are likely to share information more freely because they feel there are no real life consequences or judgments. However, as issues of reality creep into the relationships, they often disintegrate rapidly. Although not as frequent, there are relationships that are formed in this environment that are either successfully maintained exclusively in their virtual space or that successfully transition to the real world.

How marriage is defined in Second Life is varied; however, the marriage experience is very popular. Fifteen (60 percent) of the study participants either had been "partnered" in Second Life. Of those 15, six had not officially partnered, but reported that they were "unofficially" partnered. This was often because they, or their partners were in a real life marriage and their Second Life relationship had to remain secretive. Six (21 percent) of the interviewees reported that their Second Life relationships were extramarital, and of those, only one reported that his real life wife was aware of his Second Life romantic relationships.

Although there was no way to measure the average length of marriages in Second Life as many of them are not on record, marriage in Second Life is typically very brief and thus does not carry the same binding commitment that a real life marriage

traditionally involves. In fact, two study participants reported having Second Life marriages that lasted less than a day, one for only 15 minutes. Although there were anecdotal reports of Second Life marriages that had transitioned to real life, none of the current study participants had done so. Contrarily, report of Second Life marriages interfering in real life marriages was evident in the sample of 25 interviewees. In the course of this study, two participants reported separating from their real life marriages, citing their time spent in Second Life or extramarital virtual relationships as a factor in their marital discourse.

While reports of Second Life activity and romantic, intimate, or sexual interaction in the virtual world were reported as troublesome in their real life relationships, others reported that their virtual experiences had brought them closer to their real life partners. Interviewee DD explained, "with each lousey person I meet in SL… I have found greater appreciation for ppl in my RL. And this is especially true of my relationship w men here and my husband."

Implications and Future Directions

What was not long ago the vision of science fiction and fairy tales is now accessible as an everyday experience in the online 3-D immersive virtual world. Millions of people worldwide are logging into these environments in virtual games such as World of Warcraft and in social environments such as Second Life. They can essentially recreate themselves in any form they choose and "live" in their fantasy.

Understanding how to harness the power of the virtual world's potential and to guard against potential psychological and technological traps will be critical to the success of relationship formation, whether those relationships are personal or professional. Additionally, there are numerous ethical questions and concerns that

cannot be ignored. Anecdotally, there are some people who fear that the ability to choose the fantasy over reality is creating a “post-human” state or, in a sense, choosing the technological medium as the space where the mind functions and that the body is merely the shell that requires maintenance to keep the mind alive. This could be seen as a gift to someone like the disabled participant who claimed to spend 18 hours a day in Second Life. He reported that he believes that the opportunity to earn a living and connect socially is more powerful virtually than he can experience with the limitations in his real life. The most dangerous challenges come with issues of addiction or impulse control when individuals make choices to stay in the virtual world to the complete disregard of real life obligation or responsibility. This was perhaps most clearly evidenced in the case of a couple in South Korea who were so caught up in taking care of their virtual “family” in the game Prius Online that they forgot to feed their real life infant daughter who starved to death (Seib, 2010).

The other most dominant threat is that of deception as discussed by numerous participants and as blogs, chat boards, and news headlines reveal. Although the participants of this study indicated an overall willingness to trust their virtual contacts equally or greater than individuals in their real life, because of the anonymity that can be enjoyed through a virtual identity, the opportunity for deception is great in this environment. While there is almost a sense of “youthful exuberance” or naiveté among the participants in this digital culture, there is also opportunity to take advantage of those trusting individuals for personal gain or malicious intent. The level of “social capital” is high in this environment yet is also very fragile and vulnerable.

However, the threats cannot overshadow the potential of this medium. There are ways the virtual world are already being used by businesses, organizations, and

individuals to reach either very small but highly engaged audiences with very targeted interests or to reach global audiences. Although the numbers of individuals currently "residing" in Second Life pale in comparison to other mass media destinations, the opportunity to create a work, entertainment, information, education or social destination for a global audience in an interactive, engaging and immersive experience with very little resource required is staggering.

As budgets for "brick and mortar" or travel are dwindling or completely disappearing, businesses, educational institutions, and organizations will need to identify alternative solutions to bring their target audiences to a common destination that is psychologically appealing, intellectually stimulating, and accessible. The online 3-D virtual environment in Second Life appears to offer a viable environment for development of social capital in the form of trust and reciprocity. Among the participants if this study, the social interaction exchanged in this environment was not only satisfactory, but meaningful.

The challenge that lies ahead for businesses and organizations who seek to reach audiences in this environment is to find ways to allow their constituents (employees, students, volunteers, customers, activists) the opportunity to maintain the sense of safety through anonymity while at the same time creating a secure work environment. In other words, organizations will need to identify and clarify their own "uses and gratifications" of the virtual environment. For example, developers of virtual environments and programs will need to potentially balance the importance of freedom of expression and trust that is created through anonymity and the use of the environment as an extension of reality (a virtual work place) that requires real life identification for security or grading purposes. There is tremendous potential for those

who can create a common ground and a virtual habitat for creative and productive relationship development and idea or information exchange.

Public relations strategists can also apply these results to their practice as institutions are significantly challenged by the loss of trust among publics; the sources of information are becoming more diverse, diluted and specialized in our converged media culture; and the methods of reaching constituents are increasingly digital. If the ultimate goal of public relations is to change behaviors, the 3-D online immersive environment may offer a platform to reach audiences where they can "test" behaviors in a "safe" environment. The applications can apply to health communications (work currently being done in nutrition and autism spectrum disorder), behavioral modification (work currently being done with post traumatic stress disorder), and issue awareness (work currently being done with domestic violence, gender discrimination and cancer research). It will be also be important to understand the media effects of this environment and how it may serve as a supplement to traditional media strategies as well as a functional social space. As one marketing vice president of a multinational company recently posed, "If people can meet and fall in love on the Internet, why can't we create the same depth of bond with our customers that way as well?"

In the field of family science, the potential for relationship and parent/family training programs is also enormous. Because of the nature of the development of romantic relationships in this environment, there are already individuals who are effectively creating partnerships, homes and virtual families. These tools could easily be applied to family life education curricula for pre-marital education programs, parenting classes, as well as marriage and relationship education programs.

In a world that is in some ways becoming increasingly segmented and isolated, people are re-engineering the values and meanings of relationships as well as how they maintain those relationships. In “The World is Flat,” Thomas Friedman (2005) wrote, “Clearly, it is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more other people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world – using computers, email, networks, teleconferencing, and dynamic new software” (p. 8). Remaining competitive or even visible will require access, imagination, engagement, and interactivity. In an environment enhanced by social, emotional and physical presence, the possibilies are endless.

Theoretical

The present study raises a number of questions and opportunities for the development of communication, community and family theories. The benchmarks of mass communication theory have been based on a one-to-many function of a medium such as Shannon’s Model of Communication that offered a linear explanation of communication flow without interruption or influence of nonverbal cues or interactions between people. As evidenced in this study, due to the interactive nature of new media technologies, media messages are now being distributed to (or can be accessed by) the masses with an interpersonal communication function.. The very essence of mass media is challenged because in this environment, the medium is created, tailored, and experienced as a unique and personal event. Similar to what is just beginning to be measured with the use of blogs, tweets, online video posts and social networking sites, where some are created and reach millions of individuals, others are created or posted and reach no one other than its source or author. In the online 3-D environment, both

the flow of communication, as well as the barriers to communication, are different than have been experienced in any other medium. The effects of the medium are not only influenced by interactivity, but by the potentially powerful impact of the sense of presence.

This concept begs one to reconsider the idea behind McLuhan's inventory of effects and the idea that "the medium is the message." If, for example, as McLuhan argued, "All media… are extensions of man that cause deep and lasting changes in him and transform his environment," the results of this study reveal that when the human operator is also the media content creator, the transformations can be profound. As seen in the interviews, individuals in the virtual world have the opportunity to create or choose their environment and they can create or recreate one or many identities. Additionally, because the visual cues are both exaggerated by a visually stimulating environment as well as challenged by a lack of expression or body language, the virtual residents must depend on more clearly expressing themselves in text communication to effectively convey emotion or intent. In this environment, the medium is truly "an extension of man" and through the mediated experience, this research has revealed that in a sense, by "practicing" life experiences virtually, many do make "lasting changes and transform" their environments.

Additionally, a multitude of mass communications theories can be applied to the 3-D online immersive environment; however, each with a new twist as a consequence of the virtual environment. Much discussion has already been given to the potential applications and revision of social capital theory as well as the important role in understanding uses and gratifications as they exist virtually. The primary motivations that drew people to the online 3-D virtual world were exploration of self;

information/learning/intellectual growth; social interaction; sexual/romantic relationships; work; and creativity and entertainment. It is important to understand what changes are occurring in the real lives of these individuals that would lead them to either share their time in both worlds or to choose one over the other and how the effects of the medium either draw them deeper into the virtual world or repel them. If utilizing the measures of trust and reciprocity as the cornerstones of social capital, the results of this research would indicate that individuals have the ability to create bridging capital in both personal and professional relations through an enhanced sense of trust they could "safely" develop in their virtual experiences. The element of anonymity was central to trust as the study participants felt they had little to lose if no one knew who they were, or because they could simply disappear without consequence if the result of their effort was unsatisfactory.

However, if trust is built on anonymity, how strong or how meaningful is the bond? How "real" is it, if it's only "virtual?" The effect of the medium on creating a sense of real was powerful as the participants in this study affirmed prior research that found that they placed equal or greater value on a virtual friend as they did a real life friend. The same question must be raised regarding the value placed on a virtual thing. It is not uncommon to get a puzzled response from individuals who've never been in the virtual world when explaining that real money is used to buy virtual homes and clothes. If these objects do not exist in the physical world, clearly they are not providing the basic needs for human survival, yet the virtual residents place great value on their virtual goods. Researchers continue to explore why people treat virtual items like real items (the joy of getting a virtual gift in Second Life or on Facebook) and the potential economic and psychological impacts of virtual trade and virtual work (Castronova,

2010). Virtual reality challenges the notion of uses and gratifications as well as media effects as the benefits may exist only in the mind.

Lewin's theory of group dynamics still applies as this is a culture that is evolving from its very core with no preconceived notion of hierarchies or rules. The power of the group still has significant impact on individual behavior and leadership formation. Theoretically, constructs of community, relationships, trust, and the uses and gratifications of media use will need to be newly explicated within this context.

From a family systems theory approach, a number of theories will be challenged by this research as well. For example, what role does Bowlby's attachment theory play in the needs of the individuals in the virtual environment to seek security in a fragile virtual relationship? Likewise, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory may help define how to approach the development of romantic and kinship networks from a micro to a mesosystem perspective. Does this 3-D world create an environment that dictates and facilitates norms that evolve within those systems? And as family theorists, marriage and family therapists, and family life educators explore the future of family formation and romantic ties, they may develop a greater understanding the influence of creating relationships that exist only in a virtual setting on the long term expectations in real-life relationships. As Hollywood and the Brothers Grimm have long been hailed as creators of false expectations of "happily ever after," can the virtual world serve as a testing ground for relationship formation that allows for "safe" exploration of self and relationships with others and thus help create stronger and more meaningful ties? Or, does it provide a platform where those who seek fantasy and escape can skip from one relationship to another without ever creating strong bonds?

Methodological

Digital ethnography is just beginning to be explored in the social sciences as digital cultures are just now emerging. Using online surveys has become common place in sociological research yet, when studying virtual persona, most ethnographers have elected to use face-to-face interviews. As Turkle (1995) explained, "I have chosen not to report on my own findings unless I have met the Internet user in person rather than simply in persona" (p. 324). She also made that distinction as she was seeking to explore participants' relationship between virtual and real and she admitted that her work was "conservative because of its distinctly real-life bias."

This study elected to interview participants exclusively in the virtual setting – in their "native" setting, if you will, and as such the results can only be trusted in terms of the representation of the virtual participants. There were stunning arguments for the strengths of studying in this environment as individuals reported feeling more at ease than if they had been interviewed in person creating the potential to expect greater authenticity in the data just as they reported that they reveal more about themselves to others in the perceived "safe" environment of anonymity. As discussed in the findings of exploration of self and representation of self, the interviewees appeared to be very much at ease, even when asked to communicate exclusively in text rather than in a voice interview.

Contrarily, there are significant opportunities to be victim to individuals who, through the ability to conceal their identity, may be equally or more likely to give false information with malicious intent. Still, the argument can be made that people may be less likely to give accurate information when having to look their interviewer in the eye and fear judgment or retribution or as a result of misinterpreting body language.

Additionally, the semi-structured interview allowed for flexibility in the process that more effectively probed the experiences unique to each participant. Some participants, especially those who had either not been in the virtual environment for very long or who had limited experience (such as those who only had been in Second Life for work purposes and claimed they hadn't explored beyond that setting) offered little while others (such as the man from Zurich who spends 18 hours a day in-world) provided a rich description of his virtual life. Of interest, there was one participant who volunteered with whom the researcher had become friends prior to the interview. It was noted that he was much more reserved in his interview than he was observed to be in a public setting reflecting the guards that go up when individuals may feel as though they are being judged, even when their real-life identity is still completely unknown.

One of the most unexpected findings of this research was the value placed on text communication. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the study participants how they felt about doing the interview in-world and in text communication rather than voice. Only two interviewees suggested voice would have been preferred because of the ease of speaking over typing. Contrarily, many participants indicated they preferred the text format as it forced them to "think more carefully" about what they said and as a result answer in a way they perceived to be more accurately. For example, Avatar LL explained:

> There is always the possibility of deception through writing. But there is also a veil that is lifted… a certain type of inhibition we have when we speak face to face is lifted. Sometimes when we write, we say more what we would not say, because we are at a loss for words in real time."

Avatar MM agreed when she wrote, "I think [writing in text] facilitates communication… you have to work harder to communicate in typing, you have to emote more etc…" And, Avatar QQ concurred, "Hmm. I think forcing people to use text – like

in my situation – you're more forced to explain your emotion. It makes you more open to yourself, I guess." These responses add tremendous power to the argument to further explore the strength of data collected in text in a virtual setting rather than in face-to-face interviews. This research also uncovered an unexpected additional strength in conducting all interviews in-world and in text -- the guarantee of accuracy in interview transcripts. There is an unquestionable written record of information exchanged.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study could arguably also be considered strengths. As a digital ethnography, the data were collected completely within the virtual world, among virtual residents and in text form. As a result, the researcher could not observe traditional cues such as facial expressions and body language in the course of the interviews. However, because the interviews were in an immersive 3-D environment, the interview settings were designed to create a comfortable space to sit and converse, and avatars are animated to mimic natural human movement. Likewise, because the average time in-world per avatar was approximately two and a half years, they had grown aware and comfortable "emoting" those traditional body language and emotional signals through textual expressions. For instance, in text communication individuals will often wrote out what their body was experiencing such as a smile, a shrug, a laugh, or a wince. Likewise there are gesture animations an avatar can use to laugh, cry, dance, jump or wave, for example.

Although it may be considered a limitation, the inherent nature of qualitative research restricts the sample size in order to collect a manageable amount of data. Because this research sought to get the rich descriptive nature of the digital culture, the

sample pool for interviews was small. The results of this study cannot be generalized to other online 3-D worlds or necessarily to all Second Life residents. Even though the researcher attempted to conduct enough interviews to reach a clear redundancy in response, the sample was from a recruitment pool of two similar membership groups and referrals from within those groups in Second Life. Because these were discussion groups, the sample could have been slightly older, more extraverted and more educated than the average Second Life user, as evidenced in the demographic results. Further exploration with larger samples should be considered for future research.

Finally, as mentioned previously, there is always the risk in ethnographic study that the researcher can "go native." Although the focus of this study was specific to a six month period, the researcher spent nearly two years in Second Life as a participant observer. The researcher was cognizant of her positive bias for the environment and its technological potential and attempted to address this by carefully crafting the interview protocol to limit leading the interviewees.

Recommendations for Future Research

Because Second Life is only seven years old, and virtual worlds are only just beginning to reach acceptance as represented on the diffusion of innovation curve, very little is known about this medium or about its culture. Although other new online media technologies such as Facebook and Youtube reached mass adoption at much faster rates than any medium in history, the 3-D online world of Second Life has been slower to catch on. If using Gartner's hype cycle to explain the lag in growth behind these other technologies, it could be expected that adoption is still on the horizon. After the media hype that predicted the online world would be the future of marketing and advertising and the massive move into the virtual world by many companies only to

discover they were there before the audience was, there was an equally rapid exodus (the trough of disillusionment). The technology has been slower to develop than the 2-D text and image based social media tools and is harder to install and navigate. However these barriers are disappearing and greater adoption is anticipated.

Especially in the study of romantic relationships, longitudinal research will be necessary to determine how many of these relationships precede real life marriage and to determine if those marriages are any stronger or weaker than marriages formed in more traditional ways. A number of study participants also suggested that their experiences in Second Life are changing the way they understand and experience romantic relationships, including marriage. Future research should explore the polyamorous nature of relationships in the virtual world and how that influences the expectations of monogamy and interpretations of infidelity in both the real and virtual worlds.

Additional Potential Areas of Future Research

- As we see the numbers of virtual goods and services transacted increasing at phenomenal rates, marketers, advertisers, entrepreneurs, educators, companies, and non-profit organizations need to better understand and not underestimate the psychological value of virtual products and relationships.
- This environment is rich in opportunity to explore the new sense of "community" that is formed based on common interests and common goals rather than geography or cultural norms.
- A number of participants, especially those who were among the immersive users addressed the issue of addiction. Although the basic elements of survival (being food, clothing and shelter) exist in Second Life, obviously they will not provide nourishment or protection of the physical body. How significant is the issue of addiction, and how does the attraction to the virtual over the real influence ultimate quality of life?
- Because of the "leveling" effect of the virtual environment from both a visual and auditory perspective and because nearly anyone can gain access to the online program with a computer and an Internet connection, this appears to be an environment that provides tremendous opportunity for the disadvantaged (economically, socially, physically, emotionally) and shut-ins including caregivers.

These populations should be explored to determine opportunities to help them function at levels that real life cannot afford them.

- The psychological field is exploding in Second Life as professionals in the field are looking at the opportunities and challenges in providing psychological counsel in this “safe” environment. Is it truly safe and how can the industry deal with the regulations that cannot be applied in the virtual world?

- One of the most startling discoveries of this research was the number of people older than 60 who reported they were just beginning to understand themselves and/or were still exploring identity and changing behaviors. Most sociological and psychological research on human development has focused on infant, child, adolescent, and early adult development with the generalized assumption that by the time humans reach their late 20s their brains have fully developed. This study calls into question the opportunity to explore psychological development throughout the life course.

Avatar UU: yes… its kind of amazing to me. Some one told me that sl is where we wear our insides on our outsides**

APPENDIX A
ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING AND INTERNET RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Copyright © 2002 by Charles Ess and the Association of Internet Researchers PLEASE NOTE: we intend for this document to be publicly accessible, precisely so that it may contribute to reflection, debate, and education regarding Internet research ethics. At the same time, it is copyrighted and thus entails the usual requirements for "fair use" of copyrighted materials.

In particular, any DUPLICATION, CITATION AND/OR ATTRIBUTION must include the following information:

Title: Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee Authors: Charles Ess and the AoIR ethics working committee Approved by AoIR, November 27, 2002 Available online: www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf>

The ethics committee would also appreciate notification of the use of this document. Please write to: Steve Jones <sjones@uic.edu> and/or Charles Ess <cmess@drury.edu>.

FROM THE AOIR ETHICS WORKING COMMITTEE

A. Venue/environment - expectations -authors/subjects - informed consent . . . .4 - 6

Where does the inter/action, communication, etc. under study take place? *What ethical expectations are established by the venue? Who are the subjects posters / authors / creators of the material and/or inter/actions under study? Informed consent: specific considerations*

B. Initial ethical and legal considerations . . . . . .6 -9

How far do extant legal requirements and ethical guidelines in your discipline "cover" the research? How far do extant legal requirements and ethical guidelines in the countries implicated in the research apply? What are the initial ethical expectations/assumptions of the authors/subjects being studied? What ethically significant risks does the research entail for the subject(s)? What benefits might be gained from the research? What are the ethical traditions of researchers and subjects' culture and country?

Approved by the AoIR membership - 11/27/02

I. Audience, Purpose, Rationale and Approach

Audience

This document is addressed to

Researchers, *ethicists*, and *students* in the social sciences and humanities, within the academic world and/or private and/or public research institutes, who study human inter/actions[2] in the various venues made possible by the Internet;

Organizations that commission, fund, or have oversight responsibility for Internet research(e.g., Institutional Review Boards in the United States; external Learning and Teaching Support Networks' subject centers and internal Academic Standards and Policy committees in the United Kingdom; in Australia,[3] the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Australian Research Council [see<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/issues/researchethics.htm>], etc.

Academic societies and/or groups within the social sciences and humanities that promote and/or incorporate research concerning the Internet (e.g., the Japan Society for Socio-Information Studies (JSIS), <http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/jsis/>, affiliated with the National Institute of Informatics, <http://www.nii.ac.jp/index.html>; the Information Ethics Group, Oxford Computing Laboratory<http://web.comlab.ox.ac.uk/oucl/research/areas/ieg/>; and the International Center for Information Ethics (Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany)<http://icie.zkm.de/>, etc.).

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Purpose

This document represents a series of recommendations designed to support and inform those responsible for making decisions about the ethics of Internet research. It provides a resource for *researchers*, *ethicists*, and *students* by bringing together current discussion of important ethical issues and pertinent literature in the field.

It can provide support for *organisations* and related groups that commission, fund or have overall responsibility for or an interest in Internet research practices in an international context and can be used to help inform any such bodies of the ethical issues that might be considered and possible ways of resolving ethical problems.

[The committee - whose members represent eleven national cultures - is acutely aware that English, while currently the *lingua franca* of the Web, is but one of many languages in which important research and reflection takes place. As noted below, a central goal of this document is to present Internet research ethics that are intentionally pluralistic, first of all in order to preserve and foster the often diverse ethical insights of the world's cultures. While the committee has attempted to develop a comprehensive overview of issues and resources in Internet research ethics - we would welcome suggestions for additions, especially from national cultures and in languages not well represented in the current document.]

Rationale

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VII. Addendum 3: Sample consent forms (courtesy, Leslie Regan Shade) for parents and children involved in Internet research . . . . . 21 - 28 **Endnotes** . . . . . 28 - 33

The Internet has opened up a wide range of new ways to examine human inter/actions in new contexts, and from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. As in its offline counterpart, online research also raises critical issues of risk and safety to the human subject. Hence, online researchers may encounter conflicts between the requirements of research and its possible benefits, on the one hand, and human subjects' rights to and *expectations* of autonomy, privacy, informed consent, etc.

The many disciplines already long engaged in human subjects research (sociology, anthropology, psychology, medicine, communication studies, etc.[4]) have established ethics statements intended to guide researchers and those charged with ensuring that research on human subjects follows both legal requirements and ethical practices. *Researchers and those charged with research oversight are encouraged in the first instance to turn to the discipline-specific principles and practices of research* (many of which are listed below - see **IV. Resources**, pp. 11-17).

This array of ethical issues and possible (and sometimes conflicting) approaches to ethicaldecision-making are daunting, if not overwhelming. Nonetheless, as we have worked through a widerange of issues, case studies, and pertinent literature, we are convinced that it is possible - up to apoint, at least - to clarify and resolve at least many of the more common ethical difficulties.

This document - as it synthesizes the results of our nearly two years' of work together - isintended to aid both researchers from a variety of disciplines and those responsible for insuring thatthis research adhere to legal and ethical requirements in their work of clarifying and resolvingethical issues encounter in online research.

Approach
This document stresses:

Ethical pluralism
Ethical concerns arise not only when we encounter apparent conflicts in values and interests –but also when we recognize that there is more than one ethical decision-making framework used to analyze and resolve those conflicts. In philosophical ethics, these frameworks are commonly classified in terms of deontology, consequentialism, virtue ethics, feminist ethics, and several others.[5]

Researchers and their institutions, both within a given national tradition and across borders and cultures, take up these diverse frameworks in grappling with ethical conflicts. Our first goal in this document is to emphasize and represent this diversity of frameworks –not in order to pit one against another, but to help researchers and those charged with research oversight to understand how these frameworks operate in specific situations. On occasion, in fact, ethical conflicts can be resolved by recognizing that apparently opposing values represent different ethical frameworks. By shifting the debate from the conflict between specific values to a contrast between ethical frameworks, researchers and their colleagues may understand the conflict in new light, and discern additional issues and considerations that help resolve the specific conflict.[6]

Cross-cultural awareness
Different nations and cultures enjoy diverse legal protections and traditions of ethical decision-making. Especially as Internet research may entail a literally global scope, efforts to respond to ethical concerns and resolve ethical conflicts must take into account diverse national and cultural frameworks.

Guidelines – not "recipes"
As noted in our Preliminary Report (October, 2001), given the range of possible ethical decision-making procedures (utilitarianism, deontology, feminist ethics, etc.), the multiple interpretations and applications of these procedures to specific cases, and their refraction through culturally-diverse emphases and values across the globe – the issues raised by

Internet research are *ethical* problems precisely because they evoke more than one ethically defensible response to a specific dilemma or problem. *Ambiguity, uncertainty, and disagreement are inevitable*.

In this light, it is a mistake to view our recommendations as providing general principles that can be applied without difficulty or ambiguity to a specific ethical problem so as to algorithmically deduce the correct answer.

At the same time, recognizing the possibility of a range of defensible ethical [8] responses to a given dilemma does not commit us to ethical relativism ("anything goes"). On the contrary, the general values and guidelines endorsed here articulate parameters that entail significant restrictions on what may – and what may not – be defended as ethical behavior. In philosophical terms, then, like most philosophers and ethicists, we endorse here a middle-ground between ethical relativism and an ethical dogmatism (a single set of ostensibly absolute and unquestionable values, applied through a single procedure, issuing in "the" only right answer - with all differing responses condemned as immoral).

To make this point a last way: since Aristotle (in the West), ethicists have recognized that doing the right thing, for the right reason, in the right way, at the right time remains a matter of judgment or *phronesis*.[9] Again, such judgment cannot be reduced to a simple deduction from general rules to particular claims. Rather, it is part of the function of judgment to determine just what general rules indeed apply to a particular context. Developing and fostering such judgment, as Aristotle stressed, requires both guidance from those more experienced than ourselves and our own cumulative experience in seeking to reflect arefully on ethical matters and to discern what the right thing at the right time for the right reason and in the right way may be (cf. Dreyfus, 2001).

Our hope is that the materials collected here will serve Internet researchers and those who collaborate with them in attempting to resolve the ethical issues that emerge in their work - first of all, that these materials will foster precisely their own sense of *phronesis* or judgment.

II. Questions to ask when undertaking Internet research(For additional examples of such question lists, see **V. Addendum 1**, pp. 18f.)

A. Venue/environment - expectations -authors/subjects - informed consent Where does the inter/action, communication, etc. under study take place? Current venues include:

Homepages Weblogs Google searches
Email (personal e-mail exchanges) Listservs (exchanges and archives)USENET newsgroups ICQ/IM (text-based) CUSeeMe (and other audio-video exchanges) Chatrooms, including IRCMUDs/MOOs gaming images and other forms of multi-media presentation (webcams, etc.)
(some forms of) Computer-Supported Cooperative Work systems

What ethical <u>expectations</u> are established by the venue?
For example:

Is there is a posted site policy that establishes specific expectations – e.g., a statement notifying users that the site is public, the possible technical limits to privacy in specific areas or domains, etc.

Example: Sally Hambridge (Intel Corporation, 1998) has developed an extensive set of "Netiquette Guidelines" that includes the following advice:

> Unless you are using an encryption device (hardware or software), you should assume that mail on the Internet is not secure. Never put in a mail message anything you would not put on a postcard.(see <http://www.pcplayer.dk/Netikette_reference.doc>)

Is there a statement affiliated with the venue (chatroom, listserv, MOO or MUD, etc.) indicating whether discussion, postings, etc., are ephemeral, logged for a specific time, and/or archived in a private and/or publicly-accessible location such as a website, etc.?

Are there mechanisms that users may choose to employ to indicate that their exchanges should be regarded as private – e.g., "moving" to a private chatroom, using specific encryption software, etc.? – to indicate their desire to have their exchanges kept private?

One broad consideration: *the greater the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy, confidentiality, right to informed consent, etc.*

Who are the subjects posters / authors / creators of the material and/or inter/actions under study?

While all persons have rights and researchers the obligation to protect those rights, the obligation - and attendant difficulties - of researchers to protect their subjects is heightened if the subjects are (a) children and/or (b) minors(between the age of 12 and 18). In the United States, for example, children cannot give informed consent, according to the Code of Federal Regulations(<http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/mpa/45cfr46.php3>: cf. Walther, 2002).Minors also represent special difficulties, as they inhabit something of a middle ground - legally and ethically - between children and adults. For example, are web pages created by minors - but often without much understanding of the possible *harms* some kinds of posted information might bring either to the author and/or others - to be treated as the same sort of document as authored by adults, who (presumably) are better informed bout and sensitive to the dangers of posting personal information on the Web? Or are researchers rather required to exercise greater care in protecting the identity of minors - perhaps even to inform them when their materials may pose risks to themselves and/or others (see Ridderström,2002).A broad consideration: *the greater the vulnerability of the author / subject the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect the author / subject.*

[See the sample consent forms for parent(s), children (aged 13-17), and children (aged 9-12) from Leslie Regan Shade, VII. Addendum 3, pp.21ff.]

Informed consent: specific considerations
Timing

Ideally, protecting human subjects' rights to privacy, confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent means approaching subjects at the very beginning of research to ask for consent, etc.

In some contexts, however, the goals of a research project may shift over time as emerging patterns suggest new questions, etc. *Determining not only if, but when to ask for informed consent is thus somewhat context-dependent and requires particular attention to the "fine-grained" details of the research project not only in its inception but also as it may change over its course.*

Medium?

Researchers should determine what medium – e-mail? postal letter? –for both requesting and receiving informed consent best protects both the subject(s) and their project. (As is well known, compared with electronic records, paper records are less subject to erasure and corruption through power drops, operator error, etc.)

Addressees?

In studying groups with a high turnover rate, is obtaining permission from the moderator/facilitator/list owner, etc., sufficient?

How material is to be used?

Will the material be referred to by direct quotation or paraphrased? Will the material be attributed to a specified person? Referred to by his/her real name? Pseudonym? "Double-pseudonym" (i.e, a pseudonym for a frequently used pseudonym)? (Obviously, the more published research protects the confidentiality of persons involved as subjects, the less risk such publication entails for those persons. Such protections do not necessarily lessen the need for informed consent. Rather, researchers seeking informed consent need to make clear to their subjects how material about them and/or from them will be used - i.e., the specific uses of material and how their identities will be protected are part of what subjects are informed about and asked to consent to.)

B. Initial ethical and legal considerations

How far do extant legal requirements and ethical guidelines in your discipline "cover" the research? (For the guidelines as published by a number of disciplines, see Resources, below. See as well the discussion of the ethical and legal contrasts between the United States and Europe, "**VI. Addendum 2**," pp. 20f.)

How far do extant legal requirements and ethical guidelines in the countries implicated in the research apply?

For example: all persons who are citizens of the European Union enjoy strong privacy rights by law as established in the European Union Data Protection Directive (1995), according to which data-subjects must:

Unambiguously give consent for personal information to be gathered online;

Be given notice as to why data is being collected about them;

Be able to correct erroneous data;

Be able to opt-out of data collection; and
Be protected from having their data transferred to countries with less stringent privacy protections.(see <http://www.privacy.org/pi>

U.S. citizens, by contrast, enjoy somewhat less stringent privacy protections (see "**VI. Addendum 2,"** pp. 20f.).
Obviously, research cannot violate the legal requirements for privacy protection enforced in the countries under whose jurisdiction the research and subjects find themselves.

What are the initial ethical expectations/assumptions of the authors/subjects being studied? For example: *Do participants in this environment assume/believe that their communication is private?*[10] If so – and if this assumption is warranted

– then there may be a greater obligation on the part of the researcher to protect individual privacy in the ways outlined in human subjects research (i.e., protection of confidentiality, exercise of informed consent, assurance of anonymity - or at least pseudonymity - in any publication of the research, etc.).

If not – e.g., if the research focuses on publicly accessible archives; Inter/actions intended by their authors/agents as public, performative (e.g., intended as a public act or performance that invites recognition for accomplishment), etc.; venues assigned the equivalent of a "public notice" that participants and their communications may be monitored for research purposes; ….

then there may be less obligation to protect individual privacy.[11]

Alternatively: *Are participants in this environment best understood as "subjects" (in the senses common in human subjects research in medicine and the social sciences) – or as authors whose texts/artifacts are intended as public?*

If participants are best understood as subjects in the first sense (e.g., as they participate in small chat rooms, MUDs or MOOs intended to provide reasonably secure domains for private exchanges), then greater obligations to protect autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, etc., are likely to follow.

If, by contrast, subjects may be understood as authors intending for their work to be public (e.g., e-mail postings to large listserves and USENET groups; public web pages such as homepages, Web logs, etc.; chat exchanges in publicly accessible chat rooms, etc.) – then fewer obligations to protect autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, etc., will likely follow.[12]

[The following three questions are interrelated: as will be seen, they reflect both prevailing approaches to ethical decision-making – e.g., in Deborah Johnson (2001) – as well as cultural/national differences in law and ethical traditions.]

What ethically significant risks does the research entail for the subject(s)?
Examples (*form/content* distinction):

If the *content* of a subject's communication were to become known beyond the confines of the venue being studied – would harm likely result?

For example: if a person is discussing intimate topics – psychological/medical/spiritual issues, sexual experience/fantasy/orientation, etc. – would the publication of this material result in shame, threats to material well-being (denial of insurance, job loss, physical harassment, etc.), etc.?
A primary ethical obligation is to *do no harm*. Good research design, of course, seeks to minimize risk of harm to the subjects involved.

By contrast, if the *form* of communication is under study – for instance the linguistic *form* of requests ("Open the door" vs. I'd appreciate it if you'd open the door," etc.), not *what* is being requested -this shift of focus away from *content* may reduce the risk to the subject.
In either case (i.e., whether it is the *form* or *content* that is most important for the researcher), if the content is relatively trivial, doesn't address sensitive topics, etc., then clearly the risk to the subject is low.

What benefits might be gained from the research? This question is obviously crucial when research in fact may entail significant risk to the author(s)/agent(s) considered as *subjects*. From a utilitarian standpoint, research can only be justified - especially if it risks harm to individuals - if the likely benefits arguably outweigh the real and possible costs (including potential harm).From a deontological standpoint, even if significant benefits may be reasonably expected from the research - such research may remain ethically unjustified if it violates basic principles, rights, duties, etc., e.g., rights to autonomy, privacy, and so forth (cf. the "ethical protocols," **V. Addendum 1**, pp. 18f.; Elgesem, 2002).

What are the ethical traditions of researchers and subjects' culture and country? This question is crucial precisely when facing the conflict between possible risks to subjects, including the violation of basic human rights to self-determination, privacy, informed consent, etc., and the benefits of research.

In the United States, for example, there may be a greater reliance on *utilitarian* approaches to deciding such conflicts – specifically in the form of "risk/benefit" analyses - as compared with other countries and cultures. Crudely, if the benefits promise to be large, and the risks/costs small, then the utilitarian calculus may find that the benefits outweigh the risks and costs. By contrast (and as is illustrated in the differences in laws on privacy), at least on an ideal level, European approaches tend to emphasize more *deontological* approaches – i.e., approaches that take basic human rights(self-determination, privacy, informed consent, etc.) as so foundational that virtually no set of possible benefits that might be gained from violating these ethically justifies that violation.[13]

When considering conflicts between subjects' rights and benefits to be gained from research that compromises those rights – researchers and those charged with research oversight may well arrive at different decisions as to what is ethically acceptable and unacceptable, depending on which of these cultural/ethical approaches they utilize.

(See "**VI. Addendum 2,**" pp. 20f.)

We hope this list is useful as a first effort to suggest a characteristic range of questions that Internet researchers and those responsible for oversight of such research should consider - and that it is further useful as it suggests an initial range of ethically defensible ways to respond in to such questions. But of course, this list is neither complete nor final. Invariably, as Internet researchers encounter new venues, contexts, inter/actions, etc., additional questions and responses will inevitably arise (either as variations of these and/or as distinctively new). Perhaps this list will remain useful in those new contexts as it at least suggests starting points and possible analogies for raising new questions and developing new responses. In any case, we hope this document will prove helpful, at least for a while, to researchers, ethicists, and others concerned with the important ethical challenges of Internet research.

III. Case Studies

A. Are chat rooms public spaces? When should researchers obtain consent for recording conversations in a chat room? [*From:* Hudson, James M. and Amy Bruckman. "IRC Français: The Creation of an Internet-Based SLA Community." Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), forthcoming 2002.Quoted by permission from the authors and CALL.]

In our first version of IRC Français, an ethical dilemma immediately emerged. Our plan was for students to converse with native French speakers already on IRC. Clearly, the rules governing human subjects research dictate that we need freely given informed consent from our students before we can ethically use them as experimental subjects ("The Nuremberg Code," 1949).But what about their conversational partners? Were they research subjects or not? We were not studying them in particular, but were recording their conversations with our students and analyzing their words. Did we need their consent? The status of real-time chat rooms is ambiguous. On the one hand, one can argue that they are like a public square. It is considered ethical to record activities in a public place without consent, provided that individuals are not identifiable (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). In this view, we would be justified to simply record conversations and not tell anyone that this was taking place. On the other hand, one can argue that chat room conversations are normally ephemeral. Participants have a reasonable expectation that they are not being recorded without their freely given informed consent. Under this stricter interpretation, we would need consent from any person whom we wish to record. Additionally, if the process of requesting that consent proved too intrusive, we would need to abandon the research (Department of Health, 1979).With the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subjects research, we settled on a compromise approach: we would get written consent from our students, but merely notify other people on the channel of our study. These individuals would also be given the option to opt out if they so chose. Because we wrote our own client software, we could automatically send a public message to this effect when one of our students joined the channel, and then privately inform others who join the channel subsequently. To our surprise, this compromise failed. IRC participants were angered at the idea of being studied without their prior consent. Our students were greeted with hostility. They were routinely harassed by IRC channel members, and often had threats and obscenities directed at them. This seems to indicate that an opt in solution might be more acceptable than an opt out. However, there was a further problem: our messages notifying channel participants of the study and offering the opportunity to opt out were found in themselves to be unacceptably intrusive. Even though each person saw the message only once, it was still deemed unacceptable by many members. An opt in message would have that same problem. Based on the reaction our study generated, we concluded that the "public square" model is untenable and, in fact, the second interpretation holds: you may not ethically record an otherwise ephemeral medium without consent from participants. How then could we continue our research? We came upon a solution: create our own IRC channel explicitly for this project. We could direct our students to that channel, and others would not normally join. Since it was our channel, we could create a channel logon message informing people about the study and its purpose. We could also limit access to the channel to our students only; however, to date we have not found this necessary. Few people come to the channel outside of students assigned to use it, and those few are warned by the channel logon message. Now, we do not intrude on a pre-existing space, but instead have our own. In addition to solving our ethical dilemma, the new channel also provided pedagogical benefits. While people come to general IRC channels for a variety of social purposes, everyone on the IRC Français channel is there for the purpose of practicing French. This shared goal greatly improved the educational value of the conversation for all concerned.

B. Brenda Danet, "Studies of Cyberpl@y: Ethical and Methodological Aspects," available from <http://atar.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msdanet/papers/ethics2.pdf>. Prof. Danet reviews five studies presented more fully in her recent book, and discusses the ethical issues these studies raise in the contexts of

(1) two-person email

(2) typed chat in performance situations; and

(3) communication via visual images on IRC. Out of this experience and reflection, Prof. Danet develops a list of guidelines (included as Appendix III in the "aoir ethics working committee – a preliminary report" <aoir.org/reports/ethics.html>.Prof. Danet's paper is to be recommended as a primary example of a more utilitarian approach to Internet research ethics, in contrast with the more deontological approach represented by James Hudson and Amy Bruckman in case study A, above.

IV. References, Resources

References / annotated bibliography

Allen, Christina. 1996. What's Wrong with the "Golden Rule"? Conundrums of Conducting Ethical Research in Cyberspace. *The Information Society* 12 (2), 175-187.Allen describes a method of "dialogical ethics" (my terms) that works from the bottom up(following the approach of Mikhail Bakhtin) rather than beginning with general principles and moving "top down." Her approach - illustrated with an example of her own research on Lambda MOO - further draws from anthropology and cultural studies as these "acknowledge and seek to understand the ramifications of the positionality of the researcher for the phenomena and individuals under study," and thereby challenges the more prevailing approaches in medicine and social science as these instead emphasize the researcher adopting the posture of dispassionate observer (186). In contrast with the usual emphasis on protecting subjects from potential harm - Allen finds that when the research process is undertaken "as a respectful dialogism between two equal interlocutors," participants enjoy "positive gains from the process of interviewing and reflecting on their cyberspace stories" (186).In these ways, in fact, Allen's approach recalls Aristotle's emphasis on *praxis* as reshaping our ethical considerations - with the goal of achieving *phronesis* (practical wisdom or judgment): while skeptical of the possibility of abstractly codifying research ethics (because of the sorts of differences between research venues noted in this report), Allen concludes that "Researchers can, however, develop ethical wisdom that comes from experience with many configurations of research in cyberspace, and report on the conditions that grounded their ethical choices, and the results that emerged from their work in the site" (186).On this view, ethical considerations are not separate from research considerations, but rather an integral component, one interwoven as an explicit and intentional dimension of the research project itself.

American Psychological Association. 1992. Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Codes of Conduct (currently under revision). <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code.html>

Association for Computing Machinery. 1992 (October 16). ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. <http://www.acm.org/constitution/code.html>

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aoir ethics working committee – a preliminary report. 2001. <aoir.org/reports/ethics.html>

Baird, Robert M., Reagan Ramsower, and Stuart E. Rosenbaum (eds.). 2000. *Cyberethics: Social and Moral Issues in the Computer Age*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. A superb anthology – the best I've seen for both philosophically rich and fine-grained, practically-oriented analyses of specific issues (anonymity, privacy, property, and community/citizenship/democracy).Two articles are of seminal importance for those interested in Internet research ethics:

Kling, Rob, Ya-ching lee, Al Teich, and Mark S. Frankel, "Anonymous Communication Policies for the Internet: Results and Recommendations of the AAAS Conference," and "Assessing Anonymous Communication on the Internet: Policy Deliberations," both of which originally appeared in *Information Society* 15 (1999): 71-77, 79-90.

In the first, Kling et al describe their ethical foundations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948 – specifically, articles 12 and 19. They interpret these articles to mean that recipients have the right to choose to accept or refuse anonymous messages and that individuals do not have the right to impose messages upon an unwilling recipient. At the same time, law enforcement agencies and commercial interests do not have the right to interfere with individual privacy in electronic communication, regardless of whether it is anonymous or not. (100)

They further argue that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, guaranteeing the right of free speech to all Americans, "…applies equally to communications in which the initiator is identified and to those that are sent anonymously." (ibid) At the same time, they further recognize that while the right to send communications anonymously ought to be considered a "strong right," is not absolute. Any proposed limitations should be no more restrictive than those outlined in the UDHR, and "Those who propose to restrict this right in any way must assume the burden of proof and must fulfill that burden to the highest level." (ibid)

Bakardjieva, Maria and Andrew Feenberg. 2001. Involving the Virtual Subject. *Ethics and Information Technology* 2: 233-240.

Bassett, E. H. and Kathleen O'Riordan. 2002. Ethics of Internet Research: Contesting the Human Subjects Research Model. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3), 233-249. Available online: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_bassett.html>

Boehlefeld, Sharon Polancic. 1996. Doing the Right Thing: Ethical Cyberspace Research. The Information Society 12(2), 141-152.Boehlefeld argues that "doing ethical cyberspace research is not much different from doing any ethical research involving human subjects" (142). She recognizes utilitarian considerations (see p. 142) in establishing the importance of treating subjects ethically, and carefully develops guidelines for research - again, utilizing her own work as a case study based on the ethics statement of the Association of Computing Machinery. In particular, she stresses anonymity and seeking permission to use long quotes (149f.) Here she observes that "The act of seeking permission, while it may lead to 'loss' of data, could also lead to developing potentially valuable 'key informant' relationships with list participants" (150) thus reinforcing Allen's more dialogical orientation (1996).

Bruckman, Amy. 2002a. Ethical Guidelines for Research Online.<http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~asb/ethics/>

_____. 2002b. Personal communication, 8 August 2002.

_____. 2002c. Studying the Amateur Artist: A Perspective on Disguising Data Collected in Human Subjects Research on the Internet. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3), 217-231.Available online: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_bruckman.html>

Buchanan, Elizabeth A. 2002. Internet Research Ethics and Institutional Review Boards: New Challenges, New Opportunities. In *Advances in Library Administration and Organization*,19 (pp. 85-99). Edited by Edward D. Garten and Delmus Williams. Elsevier Science.

_____ (ed). 2003. *Readings in Virtual Research Ethics: Issues and Controversies*. Hershey, Pennsvlvania: Idea Group Publishing,

Bynum, Terrell Ward. 1998. Global Information Ethics and the Information Revolution. In *The Digital Phoenix: How Computers are Changing Philosophy*, Terrell Ward Bynum and James H. Moor, eds., 274-291.Bynum and Moor have pioneered the philosophical analyses of computer-related ethical issues; they have also centrally contributed to the reshaping of the professional discipline of

philosophy such that the American Philosophical Association now recognizes computer ethics and other aspects of computing as indeed philosophically significant. In this chapter, Bynum provides a classic historical timeline of how CE began with the work of Norbert Wiener in the 1940s and 1950s, and develops through the "second generation" of CE begun in the mid-1990s. He further provides a taxonomy of responses to the meta ethical questions raised by Deborah Johnson (i.e., whether CE represents anything genuinely new, or simply requires the application of extant moral theories), as well as a listing of sample topics in CE and a discussion of the ethical implications of the global reach of IT.

Danet, Brenda. 2001. "Ethical Aspects in CyberPl@y," available from <http://atar.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msdanet/papers/ethics2.pdf>.

Dreyfus, Hubert. 2001. *On the Internet*. New York: Routledge.

Elgesem, Dag. 2002. What is Special about the Ethical Issues in Online Research? *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3), 195-203. Available online: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_elgesem.html>

Ermann, M. David, Mary B. Williams, and Michele S. Shauf. 1997. *Computers, Ethics, and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press. An extensive collection that seeks to provide representative discussions of diverse ethical frameworks and characteristic positions regarding hacking, social and political impacts (Bill Gates vs. Jeremy Rifkin and Neil Postman!), work, copyright, privacy, and the ethical responsibilities of professionals. This would be a useful anthology of readings to supplement a more basic text such as Deborah Johnson's. For our purposes, the chapters on professional codes are perhaps most relevant – in particular, the discussion of the ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, which includes specific injunctions to respect privacy and honor confidentiality (pp. 317f.).This general discussion is followed by a chapter presenting nine case studies – none of which, however, deal with specific issues of Internet research.

Ess, Charles. 2002. Introduction. Special Issue on Internet Research Ethics, *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3), 177-188. Available online: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_ess.html>

Frankel, Mark S. and Sanyin Siang (for the American Association for the Advancement of Science). 1999. "Ethical and Legal Aspects of Human Subjects Research on the Internet."<http://www.aaas.org/spp/dspp/sfrl/projects/intres/main.htm>

European Commission. Privacy on the Internet - An integrated EU Approach to On-line Data Protection." <http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/dataprot/wpdocs/wpdocs_2k.htm>[Posted by Christine M. Hine to aoir ethics list]

Eysenbach, Gunther and Jim Till. 2001. "Ethical issues in qualitative research on internet communities." British Medical Journal 2001(10 Nov); 323(7321): 1103-1105. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/323/7321/1103>["an interesting utilitarian-oriented perspective for medical practitioners using social science methods" - Amanda Lenhart, posted to aoir list.]

Hamelink, Cees J. 2000. *The Ethics of Cyberspace*. London: Sage Publications. Hamelink, a prominent voice in UN and EU discussions of ethical issues in IT, develops a book-length argument for specific positions regarding rights, entitlement, security, free speech, and democratization. I'm especially taken with this work because Hamelink draws in part on Habermas in his analyses and arguments for what "democratization" via IT would look like. As well, I applaud Hamelink's final call for a Socratic education as a necessary condition for cyber-democracy (182-185).

Jankowski, Nickolas and Martine van Selm. 2001 (?). "Research Ethics in a Virtual World: Some Guidelines and Illustrations" <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/crict/vmpapers/nick.htm>

Johnson, Deborah G. 2001. *Computer Ethics*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. The third edition of perhaps the classic text in computer ethics.

Johnson provides a bit more detail on specific ethical theories than, say, Spinello, and further makes the important distinction between philosophical ethics (ch. 2) and professional ethics (ch. 3). Her topics include hacking, privacy, (intellectual) property rights, individual vs. collective responsibility, and social questions (democratization, the digital divide, and freedom of expression).Johnson's text has been enormously valuable as a pioneering text in the field, one that –unlike many philosophy texts – remains resolutely focused on the practical, real-world problems of pressing interest to IT designers and users. Hence its popularity as a teaching text in technical and professional IT programs and departments. At the same time, Johnson's text is highly regarded by philosophers as she raises a central *meta-ethical* issue of whether, at one extreme, computer ethics (CE) represents "nothing new" (and thus can be simply subsumed under extant ethical decision-making procedures) and/or, at the other extreme, CE represents radically new ethical issues for which our traditional frameworks are largely useless). Equally important is her response: Johnson defends an important middle-ground – i.e., CE issues as a "new species" of existing generic moral problems.

King, Storm. 1996. Researching Internet Communities: Proposed Ethical Guidelines for the Reporting of Results. *The Information Society*, 12: 119–128.

Mann, Chris and Fiona Stewart. 2000. An Ethical Framework (ch. 3), in Mann and Stewart, *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research: A Handbook for Researching Online,* 39-64. An excellent discussion - shaped within the framework of the E.U. Data Privacy Protection Act and informed by the authors' own extensive research experience - of what the authors call "Principles of Fair Information Processing Online." Chris Mann used this chapter as part of her teaching of a recent graduate course on Internet research ethics (June 1-6, 2002, NTNU, Trondheim, Norway). It is very well suited to classroom use, especially as complemented with materials on philosophical ethics to help establish the larger framework.

Nancarrow, Clive, John Pallister and Ian Brace. 2001. A new research medium, new research populations and seven deadly sins for Internet researchers. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 4 (3): 136-149"This paper follows on from our previous work on ethical issues in marketing research and deontological influences, in particular, codes of conduct…." (136). In fact, the authors seek to balance both deontological codes with utilitarian considerations (most importantly: if people have had unpleasant experiences of privacy violation by researchers, if they are not assured of confidentiality, etc. - they will not cooperate with researchers).[Recommended by Chris Mann.]

National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH – Norway). 2001. "Guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences, law and the humanities." <http://www.etikkom.no/NESH/guidelines.htm>

Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans<http://www.nserc.ca/programs/ethics/english/policy.htm >

Office for Protection from Research Risks, National Institutes of Health, Department Of Health And Human Services. 1991. Code of Federal Regulations. 1991. Title 45, Part 46,"Protection of Human Subjects." <http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/mpa/45cfr46.php3>

O'Riordan, Kathleen. 2002. Personal communication, 13 August 2002.

Schrum, Lynne. 1997. "Ethical Research in the Information Age: Beginning the Dialog," *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 13 (2), pp. 117-125.Excellent for its discussion of the qualitative research tradition and its connecting extant guidelines with research on listservs. Schrum develops a list of ten guidelines that stress that the authors of listserv postings are the owners of that material; e-mail should be treated as private correspondence "that is not to be forwarded, shared, or used as research data unless express permission is given"; and she likewise stresses the importance of informed consent and protecting the confidentiality of listserv members.

Sharf, B. F. 1999. Beyond netiquette: the ethics of doing naturalistic discourse research on the internet. In S. Jones (Ed.), *Doing internet research* (pp. 243-256). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.[Posted to aoir list by David Eddy-Spicer.]

Smith, Katherine Clegg. 2003. 'Electronic Eavesdropping': The ethical issues involved in conducting a virtual ethnography. In Sarina Chen and Jon Hall (eds.), *Online Social Research: Methods, Issues, and Ethics*. New York: Peter Lang.

Spinello, Richard. 2002. *CyberEthics: Morality and Law in Cyberspace*, 2nd edition. Sudbury,Mass.: Jones and Bartlett. The first chapter provides a brief but accurate introduction to basic (Western) ethical frameworks – utilitarianism, contract rights (contractarianism / Locke, Rousseau, Rawls),natural rights, and moral duty (Kant). Following these, Spinello summarizes "principilism"(used in biomedical ethics and popularized by Beauchamp and Childress), a position that asserts four *prima facie* duties: autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice. A second chapter then details a history of the Internet and a broad survey of the issues (technical, ethical, and legal) evoked by efforts to govern and regulate the Internet. With ethical theory and technical *praxis* thus established, Spinello then provides extensive overview and detailed discussion of the technical and ethical aspects of four crux problems: free speech (including attention to pornography, hate speech, and spam), intellectual property rights, privacy, and security. Each of these chapters concludes with at least one case study for analysis (some hypothetical, some real-life). Spinello's chapter on privacy comes closest to addressing issues relevant to Internet research. Of interest here is his discussion of James Moor's theory of "just consequentialism." (Within the discipline of philosophy, James Moor is one of the most significant founders and expositors of computer ethics.)I appreciated here his (brief) discussion of the differences between U.S. and European approaches to privacy issues with regard to workers (see 171f.). Consistent with the larger contrast I have articulated here (including "**VI. Addendum 2**," pp. 20f.), U.S. law provides virtually no protection for workers' privacy, in contrast with European(specifically, French and Italian) law which forbid employers' surveillance and monitoring of their employees.

Suler, John (2000). Ethics in Cyberspace Research. In Psychology of Cyberspace.<http://www.rider.edu/users/suler/psycyber/ethics.html>[John Suler provides an excellent list of questions for researchers to help them consider how far their work fulfills the requirements for informed consent, privacy, and consultation and evaluation of the study. Submitted to the aoir list by Lois Ann Scheidt <lscheidt@indiana.edu>]

Sussex Technology Group. 2001. The Company of Strangers, in S. R. Munt (ed.), *Technospaces: Inside the New Media*. London: Continuum.

Sveningsson, Malin. 2001. *Creating a Sense of Community: Experiences from a Swedish Web Chat* (dissertation). The Tema Institute – Department of Communication Studies. Linköping University. Linköping, Sweden, pp.26-44)

Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSFR). 1990. "Ethical principles for scientific research in the Humanities and Social Sciences."<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/aoir/ethics/private/Swedish_HFSR_1990b.pdf>

The UK Data Protection Site. <http://www.dataprotection.gov.uk>

Posted to the aoir ethics list by Christine Hine, who comments that the site…contains some useful items in relatively plain English, including a FAQ on how data protection issues apply to the web (locates it via "Guidance and Other publications", "Compliance Advice", then "FAQs - Web"). This has some good advice for web site owners on how to protect visitors' privacy. However, most of this applies to commercial data use. "Scientific research" may be exempt from many of the provisions, as long as fundamental rights to privacy are not infringed and anonymity of subjects is ensured. The situation on exemptions is too complex o explain in brief...but European researchers who are doing relevant research will need to clarify with their own country's data protection framework and their own institutions what their obligations are. It may come down to such issues as whether you can ensure that the data subjects are fully anonymised well before research reaches publication.... which seems to me that it might cause problems if direct quotations from newsgroup postings are used in reports.

University of Bristol, "Self Assessment Questionnaire for Researchers Using Personal Data,"available from < http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Secretary/datapro.htm>[Submitted by Christine Hine to aoir ethics list]

Waern, Yvonne. 2001. Ethics in Global Internet Research. Report from the Department of Communication Studies, Linköping University, 2001:3. (Available in PDF format from the author, <yvowa@tema.liu.se>)Includes a good discussion of utilitarian vs. rights approaches, and a series of careful reflections of how to apply the guidelines from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, including respecting human dignity implies protecting the multiple and interdependent interests of the person - from bodily to psychological to cultural integrity. (cited in Waern, p. 7)While she recognizes the utilitarian benefits of research, Waern tends to lean much more towards observing rights in research (and in this way, is an example of a stronger tendency towards the deontological among European and Scandinavian researchers). So she says in her conclusion, for example:…research should provide more benefit than harm. However, the exposition here shows that it is problematic to propose that no harm is done, and even more so to claim what benefit research gives. (11)Waern also describes a bit of Internet research on her own - one documenting the dominance of English- and German-language literature on research ethics. This leads to her observation that there is a cultural bias in Internet research and its ethics: …the ethical guidelines found (on the Internet) are based on Western culture in general and Anglo/Saxon culture in particular. It may well be the case that these guidelines place less value upon establishing trust and intimate relationship between the research and the subject than other cultures. On the other hand, it might place higher value on privacy than other cultures. A continued investigation of ethical issues in various cultures is therefore greatly needed for research with the aim of studying global Internet use. (12)

Walther, Joe. 2002. Research Ethics in Internet-Enabled Research: Human Subjects Issues and Methodological Myopia. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3). Available online:<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_walther.html>

White, Michele. 2002. Representations or People? *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3), 249266. Available online: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_white.html>

Additional Web-based resources

Information Ethics Group, Oxford Computing Laboratory
< http://web.comlab.ox.ac.uk/oucl/research/areas/ieg/>

International Center for Information Ethics (Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany)<http://icie.zkm.de/>

For a discussion of legal and other aspects, see
<http://www.unet.brandeis.edu/~jacobson/Doing_Research.html>

Stuart Offenbach (Department of Psychological Sciences, Purdue University) offers the following:

> If you are interested in Codes of Professional Ethics/Standards, I recommend the site at Illinois Institute of Technology. Vivial Weil has put together a very nice collection at
>
> <http://csep.iit.edu/codes/>
>
> In addition, there are a number of research ethics sites including the following:
>
> Ethics in Science: <http://www.chem.vt.edu/ethics/ethics.html>
>
> Office of Human Research Protection: <http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/>
>
> The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics: <http://ezinfo.ucs.indiana.edu/~appe/home.html>
>
> The Online Resource for Instruction in Responsible Conduct of Research: <http://rcr.ucsd.edu/>

Resources on US / EU / European differences

Aguilar, John R. 1999/2000. Over the Rainbow: European and American Consumer Protection Policy and Remedy Conflicts on the Internet and a Possible Solution. *International Journal of Communications of Law and Policy* (Issue 4, Winter 1999/2000, 1-57):Documents extensively the differences in consumer protection - see especially section III, "E-Commerce Concerns and the Cultural Battle Waging Between the EU and US" (11ff.)

Nihoul, Paul. 1998-1999. Convergence in European Telecommunications: A Case Study on the Relationship between Regulation and Competition (Law). *International Journal of Communications Law and Policy*, Issue 2 (Winter), 1-33.

Reidenberg, Joel R. 2000. Resolving Conflicting International Data Privacy Rules in Cyberspace, Stanford Law Review, Vol. 52:1315-1376.

[My thanks to Kirk St. Amant for making me aware of these resources.]

Resources in Philosophical Ethics

Birsch, Douglas. 1999. *Ethical Insights: A Brief Introduction*. Mountain View, California: Mayfield.

Boss, Judith. 2001. *Ethics for Life: An Interdisciplinary and Multicultural Introduction*, 2nd ed. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

Rachels, James. 1999. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3rd ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Thomson, Anne. 1999. *Critical Reasoning in Ethics: A Practical Introduction*. London, New York: Routledge.

Weston, Anthony. 2001. *A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zeuschner, Robert B. 2001. *Classical Ethics: East and West*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

V. Addendum 1: "Ethical Protocols" - Questions and decision-making guides for Internet research ethics.

1. From Dag Elgesem, What is Special about the Ethical Issues in Online Research? *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3), 195-203; available online: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_elgesem.html>. Used by permission.

Is there only minimal risk of harm? No ⑦ Exit Yes

Are the integrity and the autonomy for
research subjects adequately secured? No ⑦ Exit Yes

Is the method adequate? No ⑦ Exit Yes

Is the knowledge produced relevant enough? No ⑦ Exit Yes

OK?

From Chris Mann, Generating data online: ethical concerns and challenges for the C21 researcher. Keynote lecture, Nordic Conference on Internet Research Ethics, Trondheim, Norway, June1-2,2002. Used by permission.

Are we seeking to magnify the good?

What question is the research project addressing Is the research aiming at a goal which is good and desirable What research methods will be used to achieve that goal How will these methods be designed to ensure the results are reliable How will the results of the research be disseminated

Are we acting in ways that do not harm others?

What is the level of risk to a participant?

How are risks assessed?

Do we recognize the autonomy of others and acknowledge that they of equal worth to ourselves and should be treated so?

Will informed consent be sought from participants?

What procedures to obtain consent will be followed?

How will confidentiality be respected?

===== For additional question lists and protocols, see:

Bruckman, Amy. 2002a. Ethical Guidelines for Research Online.<http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~asb/ethics/>

Danet, Brenda. 2001. Suggested Guidelines for Discussion, aoir ethics working committee preliminary report, **Addendum III** <aoir.or/reports/ethics.html>.

University of Bristol, "Self Assessment Questionnaire for Researchers Using Personal Data," available from < http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Secretary/datapro.htm>[Posted by Christine M. Hine to aoir ethics working committee]

Suler, John (2000). Ethics in Cyberspace Research. In Psychology of Cyberspace.<http://www.rider.edu/users/suler/psycyber/ethics.html>[Posted by Lois Ann Scheidt to aoir list])

VI. Addendum 2: Discussion of contrast between utilitarian and deontological approaches - as these are reflected in contrasts between the U.S. and Europe (Scandinavia and the EU) in laws regarding privacy and consumer protection.

As noted in our Preliminary Report, a comparison between extant US (e.g., the Belmont Report, the Federal Codes, the 1999 AAAS report, and a spread of articles from US-based researchers and ethicists) and EU guidelines (first of all, the NESH guidelines [National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities [NESH], Norway) "Guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences, law and the humanities." [2001]:<http://www.etikkom.no/NESH/guidelines.htm>] and the EU Data Privacy Protection Act) – there appears to be a clear contrast between US and EU approaches. In ethical terms, it is the contrast between more utilitarian (US) approaches (e.g., as these are more likely to allow cost-benefit analyses to override concerns regarding primary rights and responsibilities) and more deontological(EU) approaches (as these lay greater stress on protecting individual rights - first of all, the right to privacy - even at the cost of thereby losing what might be research that promises to benefit the larger whole).[14] This contrast can be seen, for example, in the differences between two "ethical protocols" available on the web, the first from the UK and the second from the US:

> University of Bristol, "Self Assessment Questionnaire for Researchers Using Personal Data," available from < http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/Secretary/datapro.htm>;
> Suler, John (2000). Ethics in Cyberspace Research. In Psychology of Cyberspace. <http://www.rider.edu/users/suler/psycyber/ethics.html>.[15] More broadly, it appears that this contrast is further mirrored in the contrast between the EU and the US in terms of laws regarding privacy and consumer protection. According to the **1995 E.U. Data Privacy Protection Act**, data-subjects must:

> Unambiguously give consent for personal information to be gathered online;
> Be given notice as to why data is being collected about them;
> Be able to correct erroneous data;
> Be able to opt-out of data collection; and
> Be protected from having their data transferred to countries with less stringent privacy protections.(see <http://www.privacy.org/pi>

In this light, it is clear that ***E.U. citizens enjoy a priority on individual privacy*** vis-a-vis business interests -i.e., a *deontological* emphasis on **respect for persons** in the form of privacy protections vs. U.S. favoring **business interests** over individual privacy. For example, Reidenberg argues that while there is *global convergence* on what he calls the First Principles of data protection - there are clear *differences* in how these First Principles are implemented, i.e., through "*either liberal, market-based governance or socially-protective, rights-based governance*." (Joel R. Reidenberg, Resolving Conflicting International Data Privacy Rules in Cyberspace, *STANFORD LAW REVIEW* [Vol. 52 (2000):1315-1376], 1315) In particular, the European model is one in which omnibus legislation strives to create a complete set of rights and responsibilities for the processing of personal information, whether by the public or private sector. First Principles become statutory rights and these statutes create data protection supervisory agencies to assure oversight and enforcement of those rights. Within this framework, additional precision and flexibility may also be achieved through codes of conduct and other devices. Overall, this implementation approach treats data privacy as a political right anchored among the panoply of fundamental human rights and the rights are attributed to "data subjects" or citizens. (1331f.)

By contrast, the United States is distinctive in its approach, in which … the primary source for the terms and conditions of information privacy is self-regulation. Instead of relying on governmental regulation, this approach seeks to protect privacy through practices developed by industry norms, codes of conduct, and contracts rather than statutory legal rights. Data privacy becomes a market issue rather than a basic political question, and the rhetoric casts the debate in terms of "consumers" and users rather than "citizens." (1332)

VII. Addendum 3: Sample consent forms (courtesy, Leslie Regan Shade) for parents and children involved in Internet research.

Consent form (Parent)

Leslie Regan Shade Department of
Communication University of Ottawa
Tel: 562-5800 x3827

shade@aix1.uottawa,ca

I,_____, agree to allow my child to participate in the research, *Children, Young People, and New Media in the Home*, conducted by Leslie Shade, of the Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa. The project is under the supervision of Leslie Shade. The purpose of the research is to develop new insights into the social meanings that Internet and related new media give for children and families by discussing with children in detail their experiences with these services, both in the context of their actual use, and in their home environment.

My participation will consist essentially of attending one session in my house for two times during one 12-month period of time, during which I will remain within the house while the interview session with my child is being conducted, which will last for approximately one hour in length. The sessions have been scheduled for _____. I understand that the contents of this research will be used by the Researcher only for the purposes of academic research, including sharing with colleagues at academic conferences and in academic publications, and that my and my child's anonymity will be respected (real names will not be used in the research dissemination nor will any personal details be revealed that could compromise our identity).

My child and I can choose the methods in which the interviews will take place, which can include digital videography, audio tape-recording, or note-taking. I can also choose whether to allow the digital videography to be used in conference presentations, and to be published (via Web video-streaming) on a website maintained for this project. I understand that the anonymity of my child will be maintained in the digital videography, as no real names will be revealed. If, during the course of the videography, real names are disclosed, they will be edited out. At the end of this form are the appropriate permissions for these activities.

I understand that since this activity deals with very personal information, if it becomes apparent to me, as a parent, or to the Researcher, Leslie Shade, that this is causing some discomfort for my child, the interview will cease. I have received assurance from the Researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences, through sensitive questioning of my child. If, at any time, my child is uncomfortable with the digital videography or tape-recording, my child is free to ask the Researcher to stop. My child is also free to withdraw from the project at any time, before or during an interview, refuse to participate and refuse to answer particular questions.

I have received assurance from the researchers that the information my child and I will share will remain strictly confidential. Anonymity will be assured through the use of pseudonyms in research analysis and in publications and academic presentations of this research. Digital video recordings, tape recordings of interviews and other data collected will be kept in a secure manner. Contents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers' office for a period of between 5-10 years after the date of research publications, and be only available to the researcher and her research assistants.

Benefits of the research: This research will examine the point of view of children and youth and their everyday experiences of using new media in their home. Similar research, to date, has been conducted from an adult-centered perspective. However, children and youth are the fastest growing segment of Internet users, using new media in both the educational and social realms. Children and young people will have an important role to play in the future development of new media, and this is recognized by the federal and provincial government because diverse programs have been established in Canada to make sure that children and youth have access to the Internet in schools and community centers.

It is therefore an opportune time to investigate how children and youth are using new media within their home, because many families have computers and Internet access. One of the research questions this study will investigate is how socio-economics determines media access and opportunities for social participation. In terms of lifestyle, how do children and young people relate to the variety of new media now available to them? What influences their media choices? What new media forms are being created and marketed to children and young people? Are there gender differences in the ways children and youth utilize new media?

Any information about my rights as a research participant may be addressed to Catherine Lesage, Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, 30 Stewart Street, Room 301, (613) 562-5387 orclesage@uottawa.ca .

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

If I have any questions about the conduct of the research project, I may contact the Researcher at Department of Communication, University of Ottawa, 554 King Edward Ave., Ottawa ON K1N6N5. Tel: 613-562-5800 x3827; fax: 613-562-5240; e-mail: shade@aix1.uottawa.ca

Researcher's signature

Date

Research Subject's Parent's signature

Date

I consent to allowing my child to be recorded via digital videography

Parents initials I do not consent to allowing my child to be recorded via digital videography

Parents initials I consent to allowing the digital videography of my child to be presented at academic conferences

Parents initials I do not consent to allowing the digital videography of my child to be presented at academic conferences

Parents initials I consent to allowing the digital videography of my child to be published on the Project Website

Parents initials I do not consent to allowing the digital videography of my child to be published on the ProjectWebsite

Parents initials

Assent form (Child, aged 13-17)

Leslie Regan Shade
Department of Communication
University of Ottawa
Tel: 562-5800 x3827
shade@aix1.uottawa,ca

I,_____, agree to participate in the research, *Children, Young People, and New Media in the Home*, conducted by Leslie Shade, of the Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa. The project is under the supervision of the researcher Leslie Shade. The purpose of the research is to understand how young people are using the Internet and other new media (such as videogames) in their daily lives. I understand that the research will consist of me agreeing to be interviewed for two interviews, for one-hour in length, twice in one 12-month period. During these interviews, I will be asked questions from the Researcher about how I use the Internet and other new media, while I am in my home. I can also show the Researcher what I do on the Internet and with videogames.
I understand that the contents of this research will be used by the Researcher only for the purposes of her academic research, including sharing with colleagues at academic conferences and in academic publications, and that my anonymity will be respected (my real name will not be used, and no personal details will be disclosed that could reveal my real identity).

I may choose whether I want to be recorded on the digital video recorder, or tape-recorder, and I can also refuse to allow the digital videography to be used in conference presentations, and to be published on a website maintained for this project. I understand that my anonymity will be assured as my real name will not be revealed. If I have agreed to be filmed, but during the course of the filming, my real name is disclosed, I understand it will be edited out.

If, during the course of the interview, I feel uncomfortable about any questions that are asked of me, I can refuse to answer at any time during the interview, or ask for the interview to stop. I am under no pressure to answer all of the questions, and I have been told by the Researcher that I can stop at any time.

I understand that my interview and identity will remain confidential. My anonymity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym (a made-up name) when the Researcher is analyzing the material and in her publications and conference presentations of this research.

I understand that digital video recordings, tape recordings of interviews and other data collected will be kept in a secure manner. Contents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the Researchers' office for a period of between 5-10 years after the date of publications, and be only available to the researcher and her research assistants.

Benefits of the research: This research will examine the point of view of children and youth and their everyday experiences of using new media in their home. Similar research, to date, has been conducted from an adult-centered perspective. However, children and youth are the fastest growing segment of Internet users, using new media in both the educational and social realms. Children and young people will have an important role to play in the future development of new media, and this is recognized by the federal and provincial government because diverse programs have been established in Canada to make sure that children and youth have access to the Internet in schools and community centers.

It is therefore an opportune time to investigate how children and youth are using new media within their home, because many families have computers and Internet access. One of the research questions this study will investigate is how socio-economics determines media access and opportunities for social participation. In terms of lifestyle, how do children and young people relate to the variety of new media now available to them? What influences their media choices? What new media forms are being created and marketed to children and young people? Are there gender differences in the ways children and youth utilize new media?

If I am concerned about any of this research, I can talk to the Researcher or my parent(s). My parent(s) can also contact the University of Ottawa if they or I have questions about my rights as a research participant: Catherine Lesage, Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, 30 Stewart Street, Room 301, (613) 562-5387 or clesage@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

If I have any questions about the conduct of the research project, I may contact the Researcher at the Department of Communication, University of Ottawa, 554 King Edward Ave., Ottawa ON K1N6N5. Tel: 613-562-5800 x3827; fax: 613-562-5240; e-mail: shade@aix1.uottawa.ca

Researcher's signature

Date

Research Subject's signature

Date

I consent to be recorded via digital videography

Research subject’s initials

I do not consent to be recorded via digital videography

Research subject’s initials

I consent to allowing the digital videography to be presented at academic conferences

Research subject’s initials

I do not consent to allowing the digital videography to be presented at academic conferences

Research subject's initials

I consent to allowing the digital videography to be published on the Project Website

Research subject's initials

I do not consent to allowing the digital videography to be published on the Project Website

Research subject's initials

====
Assent form (Child, aged 9-12)

Leslie Regan Shade Department of Communication
University of Ottawa
Tel: 562-5800 x3827

shade@aix1.uottawa,ca

I,_____, and my parents agree that I can participate in the research, *Children, Young People, and New Media in the Home*. This research is being done by Leslie Shade, of the Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa..This research is looking at how kids like me are using the Internet and videogames in their homes. The research will be beneficial to educators and society because it will look at how kids are actually using new media and whether it can be improved. The talk with the Researcher will last for about one hour, and will happen two times in a year.

The Researcher will be coming into my home and asking me questions about what I do on the Internet or with videogames. I can also show the Researcher what I do on the Internet and with videogames. My parents and I can choose whether I will be filmed or tape-recorded. We can also say if we allow the film of me to be shown at conferences, or to be put on a website for others to look at.

I understand that my talk with the Researcher will be used only used by her. I understand that myreal name will never be used. The researcher will give me a made-up name to describe me.

If I ever feel uncomfortable about any questions the Researcher asks me, I can refuse to answer at any time. I can also ask for the interview to stop at any time. I am under no pressure to answer all of the questions.

I understand that the interviews with me will be safe in the Researchers office, and that no one except her will be able to look at them.

If I am concerned about any of this research, I can talk to the Researcher or my parent(s). My parent(s) can also contact the University of Ottawa if we have questions about my rights as a research participant: Catherine Lesage, Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, 30 Stewart Street, Room 301, (613) 562-5387 or clesage@uottawa.ca .

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

If my parents and I have any questions about the conduct of the research project, I may contact theResearcher at the Department of Communication, University of Ottawa, 554 King Edward Ave.,Ottawa ON K1N 6N5. Tel: 613-562-5800 x3827; fax: 613-562-5240; e-mail: shade@aix1.uottawa.ca

Researcher's signature

Date

Research Subject's signature

Date

====

Assent form (Child, aged 6-8)

Leslie Regan Shade Department of
Communication University of Ottawa
Tel: 562-5800 x3827

shade@aix1.uottawa,ca

I,_____, and my parents agree that I can participate in the research, *Children, Young People, and New Media in the Home*. This research is being done by Leslie Shade, of the Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa.

This research is looking at how kids like me are using the Internet and videogames in their homes. The Researcher will be coming into my home and asking me questions about what I do on the Internet or with videogames. My parents and I can choose whether I will be filmed or tape-recorded.

If I ever feel uncomfortable about any questions the Researcher asks me, I can refuse to answer at any time. I can also ask for the interview to stop at any time.

If I am concerned about any of this research, I can talk to the Researcher or my parent(s). My parent(s) can also contact the University of Ottawa if we have questions about my rights as a research participant: Catherine Lesage, Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, 30 Stewart Street, Room 301, (613) 562-5387 or clesage@uottawa.ca .

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

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Researcher's signature

Date

Research Subject's signature

Date

====

Endnotes

[1] My profound thanks to the members of the committee who have generously shared their time, expertise, and care through discussion and critical evaluation of the issues raised in this document. The committee includes: Poline Bala – Malaysia; Amy Bruckman – USA; Sarina Chen - USA; Brenda Danet – Israel/USA; Dag Elgesem – Norway; Andrew Feenberg - USA; Stine Gotved – Denmark; Christine M. Hine – UK; Soraj Hongladarom - Thailand; Jeremy Hunsinger - USA; Klaus Jensen Denmark; Storm King - USA; Chris Mann - UK; Helen Nissenbaum - USA; Kate O'Riordan - UK; Paula Roberts - Australia; Wendy Robinson - USA; Leslie Shade - Canada; Malin Sveningson - Sweden; Leslie Tkach - Japan; John Weckert Australia.

[2] "Inter/action" is intended as a shorthand for "actions and/or interactions" - i.e., what humans do, whether or not our actions engage and/or are intended to engage with others. Part of the intention here is to avoid other terms, e.g., "behavior," that are too closely tied in the social sciences to specific approaches, schools of thought, etc. (By contrast, as the citations from Deborah Johnson make clear [note 5, below], "behavior" is used as a more neutral term in philosophical ethics.)

[3] Matthew Allen explains that in Australia,

> research ethics are covered by national processes, mainly formulated by the National Health and Medical Research Council but also adopted by the Australian Research Council (which covers all other types of research). Each university has instituted a scheme, based on the NHMRC requirements, for internal ethics management, since most of the available research funds come from those two councils. While each university Office of Research (or similar) will have its specific procedures and guidelines, the national position is best explained by the documents found at the NHMRC's ethical issues webpage, <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/issues/researchethics.htm>.
>
> It should be noted that while most of the specific ethical considerations covered by the NHMRC will not apply to Internet researchers (most involve the use of medical procedures), there are still key aspects of the process that are highly relevant; moreover the overall framework of for ethical research is covered in detail by the NHMRC. (E-mail to Charles Ess, 3 November 2002)

[4] In their project to collect all (English) literature pertinent to online research, the Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility of the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) includes the following disciplines: Anthropology, Business, Communications/Media, Computer Science, Economics, Education, Law, Linguistics, Medicine,

Nursing, Pharmacology, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Social Work, Sociology, and Statistics. (AAAS CSFR, "Categories.doc," quoted by permission.)

[5] Deborah Johnson (2001) provides excellent definitions of these (and other) basic terms in her classic introduction to computer ethics.

"*Utilitarianism* is an ethical theory claiming that what makes behavior right or wrong depends wholly on the consequences….utilitarianism affirms that what is important about human behavior is the outcome or results of the behavior and not the intention a person has when he or she acts" (36: emphasis added, CE). When faced with competing possible actions or choices, utilitarian approaches apply an ethical sort of cost/benefit approach, in the effort to determine which act will lead to the greater benefit, usually couched in terms of happiness (a notoriously difficult and ambiguous concept – thus making utilitarian approaches often difficult to apply in *praxis*). As Johnson goes on to point out here, there are several species of utilitarianism (what some ethicists also call *teleological* or goal-oriented theories). Briefly, one can be concerned solely with maximizing benefit or happiness for oneself (*ethical egoism*) and/or maximizing benefit or happiness for a larger group (hence the utilitarian motto of seeking "the greatest good for the greatest number").

"By contrast, *deontological theories* put the emphasis on the internal character of the act itself," and thus focuses instead on the motives, intentions, principles, values, duties, etc., that may guide our choices" (Johnson 2001, 42: emphasis added, CE). For *deontologists*, at least some values, principles, or duties require (near) absolute endorsement – no matter the consequences. As we will see in this document, *deontologists* are thus more likely to insist on protecting the fundamental rights and integrity of human subjects, *no matter the consequences* – e.g., including the possibility of curtailing research that might threaten such rights and integrity. Utilitarians, by contrast, might argue that the potential benefits of such research outweigh the possible harms to research subjects: in other words, the greatest good for the greatest number would justify overriding any such rights and integrity.

Virtue ethics derives in the Western tradition from Plato and Aristotle. The English word "virtue" in this context translates the Greek arete - better translated as "excellence." In this tradition, "…ethics was concerned with excellences of human character. A person possessing such qualities exhibited the excellences of human good. To have these qualities is to function well as a human being" (Johnson 2001, 51).

Contemporary feminist ethics traces much of its development to Carol Gilligan's work on how women make ethical decisions – in ways that both parallel and often sharply contrast with the ethical developmental schema established by Lawrence Kohlberg. Briefly, Gilligan found that women as a group are more likely to include attention to the details of relationships and caring, choosing those acts that best sustain the web of relationships constituting an ethical community – in contrast with men who as a group tend to rely more on general principles and rules. For Gilligan, this basic contrast between an ethics of care and an ethics of justice is by no means an either/or choice: on the contrary, she finds that the highest stages of ethical development are marked by the ability to make use of both approaches. See Rachels (1999, 16274) for an overview and suggestions for further reading.

Rachels also provides a more complete account of utilitarianism, deontology, and still other ethical decision-making procedures. In addition, interested readers are encouraged to review Weston (2001), Thomson (1999), Birsch (1999), and Boss (2001) for both more extensive discussion and applications of ethical theory. (See note 7 below for additional resources in cross-cultural ethics.)

Finally, while ethicists find that these distinctions between diverse theories and approaches are useful for clarifying discussion and resolving conflicts – they (largely) agree that a complete ethical framework requires a careful *synthesis* of several of these theories.

[6] See Bruckman (2002c) and Walther (2002) for specific examples of an *ethical pluralism* that allows us to recognize a range of specific ethical positions as legitimate, rather than either insisting on a single ethical value (monolithic ethical dogmatism) or simply giving up on ethics altogether and embracing ethical relativism. The examples and models of such pluralism, as a middle ground between dogmatism and relativism, are consistent with the larger convergence that I suggest is taking place (Ess, 2002) - i.e., as these offer us specific instances and frameworks that encompass both agreement (e.g., on basic values or first principles) and irreducible differences (e.g., in the specific application of those basic values, principles, etc.): see also King (1996) and Smith (2003).

[7] *Cross-cultural* differences are addressed especially by an ethical pluralism that rests on a shared commitment to a fundamental norm, value, or guideline: the *interpretation* or *application* of that norm, however, differs in different contexts. For example, a central issue for Internet researchers is whether, and if so, under what circumstances *informed consent* is required - especially if *recording* activity is taking place. For U.S.-based researcher Joe Walther (2002), such recording is ethically unproblematic. For Norwegian ethicist Dag Elgesem (2002), by contrast, such recording (audio and/or video) requires informed consent. In both cases, however, the issue is one of *expectations*. For Elgesem and the

NESH guidelines, people in public places do not *expect* to be recorded without their knowledge and consent. By contrast, Walther follows Jacobsen's argument that such expectations are misplaced. Hence, while Elgesem and Walther reach different conclusions regarding the ethical propriety of recording inter/actions in public spaces on the Net -they do so through a *shared* argument: in both cases, the *expectations* of the actors/agents involved are paramount. Hence, while the U.S. and Norwegian positions differ on a first level - on a second (meta-ethical) level, they *agree* on the ethical importance of actors' expectations. This *ethical pluralism* thus conjoins both important *shared norms or values* (the importance of expectations in guiding our ethical responses) and *differences* (in the interpretation or application of those norms or values).

This same sort of pluralistic structure, finally, is at work with regard to the significant differences between U.S. and European Union approaches to computer ethics in general and Internet research ethics in particular. Broadly, the European Union Data Privacy Protection laws and ethical codes for research (primarily, the NESH guidelines) more fully endorse a *deontological* insistence on protecting the rights of individuals, *no matter the consequences*. By contrast, U.S. law regarding data privacy appears to favor the *utilitarian* interests of economic efficiency (see Aguilar 1999/2000 for an extensive comparison). This same contrast can be seen in research guidelines: for example, where U.S.-based research guidelines focus on the protection solely of the *individual* participating in a research project - the NESH guidelines require researchers to respect not only the individual, but also "….his or her private life and close relations…." (2001). But again, these large differences may again be seen as differences on a first level - i.e., with regard to *interpretation*, *implementation*, etc. - coupled with fundamental *agreements* on a second level, i.e., with regard to shared *values, norms, commitments*, etc. So Paul Reidenberg discerns a global convergence on what he calls the First Principles of Data Protection: the differences we have noted result from differences in *implementation*, i.e., through "either [current U.S.-style] liberal, market based governance or [current E.U.-style] socially-protective, rights-based governance" (2000, 1315). Similarly, Diane Michelfelder traces the ways in which both U.S. and European law are rooted in a *shared* conception of fundamental human rights - conceptions articulated both in the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and in the U.S. Constitution itself (2001, 132).

See also **VI**: **Addendum 2**, pp. 20f. For cross-cultural approaches to ethics in addition to Boss (2001), see, for example Zeuschner (2001).

[8] The term "ethical relativism" as used here is often - but unnecessarily - the occasion for considerable confusion, because philosophers usually use the term differently from their colleagues in the social sciences.
That is: ethicists distinguish between *ethical relativism*, on the one hand, and *cultural relativism*, on the other. The latter is a methodological starting point for anthropology and other human sciences, one that takes a morally neutral stance in the effort to simply *describe*, rather than judge, the morés, beliefs, habits, and values of a particular culture or time. In this way, cultural relativism consists of *descriptive* "is" statements: it simply is the case, descriptively considered, that values, beliefs, customs, habits, practices, etc., differ from culture to culture.
Ethical relativism, by contrast, is a *normative* position - i.e., one that *prescribes* a specific moral stance and in the language of "ought." Most briefly, ethical relativism begins with the claim that *there are no universally valid values*, and therefore, one *ought* not to feel any obligation to any claims to such universal values: and in the absence of such universal values, one *ought* to do whatever seems best to the individual (whether as inspired by desire, reason, self-interest, altruism, dis/conformity with prevailing norms, etc.). Finally, because no universal values exist, and one *ought* to do what seems best to the individual - one also *ought* to not impose one's own moral views on others, one *ought* not to judge others, etc. In sum, "anything goes."

Confusion between these two views often arises in part because *ethical relativism* usually supports its premise that there are no universally valid values with the *descriptions* developed from the perspective of *cultural relativism*. That is, given the simple *description* that values, etc., vary from culture to culture, ethical relativism draws the conclusion (erroneously, on both logical and empirical grounds) that this diversity must mean there are no universal values, valid for all times and places. From here, then, there is the move to the *ought* statements - e.g., one *ought* to do as it seems best to the individual, etc.

Most contemporary ethicists, to my knowledge, generally reject *ethical relativism* on a range of grounds (empirical and logical) as the last word in ethics: but it is recognized as an important position among a range of positions, one that is defensible at least up to a point (e.g., with regard to fashion, etc.) Hence, to identify someone as an ethical relativist does not automatically count as a statement of ethical condemnation. Rather, ethical relativism is to be examined seriously, along with its supporting and critical arguments and evidence, as part of a critical analysis of diverse ethical views.

Despite their overlap, *cultural relativism* - as a methodological principle and correlative descriptions within the social sciences - is not to be confused with *ethical relativism* as a particular *normative* theory. Specifically: when philosophers criticize ethical relativism -they thereby do not mean to attack cultural relativism as an important component of the social sciences, as if the philosophers were seeking to make ethical judgments that would restrict and undermine the

disciplines and findings of the social sciences. Rather to the contrary, philosophers distinguish between ethical and cultural relativism, precisely in order to distinguish the (legitimate, if arguable) ethical position from the methodological starting point and (more or less) universally accepted description of diverse cultures.

[9] Aristotle defines *phronesis* as "…a truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to things that are good and bad for human beings." (*Nichomachean Ethics, VI.v.4*, Rackham trans.)

[10] Amy Bruckman points out that people's expectations regarding their online communication are often out of sync with the realities of online communication - e.g., BLOG authors' expectations as to who will read their material, etc. (Bruckman, 2002b).

[11] The NESH guidelines (National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities [NESH], Norway) "Guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences, law and the humanities." [2001]: <http://www.etikkom.no/NESH/guidelines.htm>) point out that "public persons" and people in public spaces have a reduced expectation of privacy, such that simple observation of such persons and people is not ethically problematic. By contrast, *recording* (e.g., using audio- or videotape) such persons and people does require their (informed) consent. In this direction, see also Bakardjjeva and Feenberg (2000), who argue for taking into account "participant interests" and expectations, leading to their principle of non-alienation – granting participants' the right to control what happens to their communications as part of a collaborative model of Internet research especially suited to the "dialogical affordances" of the Internet (238).

On the other hand, with reference, for example, to Benjamin's concept of the *flaneur* and the Sussex Technology Group (2001), O'Riordan observes that "some research/theory also points the other way, to the inversion of publics where the private-in-public space can be perceived to be more private than the spatially 'private.' (2002).

[12] For discussion of participants as subjects - and thus subject to U.S. Federal Codes - see Walther (2002). For discussion of participants as activists, authors, and/or amateur authors whose work -especially as treated from the disciplines and ethical perspectives of the humanities - see Bassett and O'Riordan (2002), Bruckman (2002c), and White (2002).

As a middle ground between more public and more private domains, and between greater and lesser obligation to protect privacy – there is the correlative set of expectations as to what counts as polite or courteous behavior, sometimes called "Netiquette." For example, it is arguable that any listserv or e-mail is public because the Internet is technologically biased in favor of publicity, listserv archives are often made available publicly on the Web, etc. Insofar as this is true, there is no strict ethical obligation, say, to ask permission before quoting an e-mail in another context. Nonetheless, it seems a matter of simple courtesy, if not ethical obligation, to ask authors for permission to quote their words in other electronic domains.

If the request is for quoting an electronic document *in print*, then prevailing practice – and perhaps the requirements of copyright law? – strongly suggest that all such quotes require explicit permission from the author. (For arguments that *everything* posted on the Web is *de facto* subject to copyright law, see Bruckman [2002c] and Walther [2002].)

See also Allen (1996), who argues for a "ground-up" dialogical ethics - i.e., one developed over the course of the research project through on-going communication with one's research *authors* (in contrast with the usual social science and medical approach that presumes these are *subjects*). The results of this approach are a concrete instance of the sort of middle ground described above.

[13] The point of the contrast sketched out here (and developed more fully below - see especially endnotes 14, 16) is simply to illustrate that ethical approaches and traditions vary among countries and cultures, and thus it is important to be aware of and take these larger contexts into account.

For its own part, of course, this particular example is open to criticism and further refinement. In particular, Malin Sveningsson has challenged this contrast as follows:

> If we look at Sweden, for example, there is a difference between what is stated in the ethical guidelines and what is actually done. I guess you could say that the ethical guidelines draw up lines for what would be the **ideal** research design. At the same time, the Swedish Research Council acknowledges that it might not always be possible to strictly follow the guidelines. They also stress the importance of doing important research that will benefit society and its members, and state that ethical guidelines sometimes have to be measured against this. So, my point is: It is possible that ethical GUIDELINES are more strict and deontological, but in practice, researchers might not be more strict than in, for example, the US. (2002)

Sveningsson points to her own work (2001) as an example of research more utilitarian in its ethics, in contrast with Amy Bruckman's guidelines (<http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~asb/ethics/>) as more deontological.

[14] Consider the following comments on the NESH guidelines (from aoir ethics working committee Preliminary Report):
More stringent ethical obligations – and requirements
The ethical requirements established here appear to be somewhat more stringent than in other statements we've examined. For example:

The obligation to respect human dignity

> Human dignity implies that every one of us has interests that can not be set aside, whether in the interests of greater insight or to benefit society in other ways.

That is, *contra* the utilitarian approach that allows individual interests, including life, to be overridden if necessary for the greater good – this statement seems to say that human dignity is an absolute, which cannot be overridden for the sake of benefit for others.

The obligation to inform research subjects

> Persons who are the subjects of research must be given the information they need for a reasonable understanding of the research field, of the consequences of participating in the research project, and of the object of the research. They must also be told who is paying for the research.

While we have discussed the advisability of subjects knowing about funding sources, I don't recall that we've been collectively insistent on this point.

The obligation to respect individuals' private lives and families

> Researchers must show due respect for the individual's private life. Each person is entitled to control over whether or not to make identifiable information on his or her private life and close relations available to others. Respect for privacy is intended to protect people against unwanted interference and against unwanted observation.

I find this striking as it includes one's family and/or other close relations as part of the circle of protection that researchers must draw. By contrast, I've always assumed in reading other guidelines and statements that the obligation to protect the identity of one's subjects mean solely the individual.

The confidentiality requirement

> Persons who are made the subjects of research are entitled to confidential treatment of all information they give. The researcher must prevent the use and transmission of information which may harm the individual on whom the research is being carried out. *The research material must normally be rendered anonymous, and the storage and destruction of lists of names or personal identity numbers must satisfy strict requirements.* (Emphasis added, CE)

[15] This contrast is also apparent, for example, between the guidelines suggested by Amy Bruckman and Susan Herring both U.S.-based researchers. See Jankowski, Nickolas and Martine van Selm. 2001 (?). "Research Ethics in a Virtual World: Some Guidelines and Illustrations" <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/crict/vmpapers/nick.htm> for a discussion of this contrast as presented as part of a panel discussion at aoir 2.0.

[16] Diane Michelfelder (The moral value of informational privacy in cyberspace. *Ethics and Information Technology* 3 [2001]: 129-135) has argued that both the U.S. and European law are able to root privacy as a fundamental human right. To begin with,

> legal protection for privacy in the US has grown up around two fundamental privacy interests. On the one hand, there is the constitutional right to privacy first established by the US Supreme Court decision in Griswold v. Connecticut.(4) On the other hand, there is the …constitutional right to informational privacy backed by the Fourth Amendment as well as by tort-related guarantees. The former finds its moral basis largely rooted in a single value, the value of personal autonomy. The latter finds its moral basis in a host of different values, including personal liberty and dignity, solitude, self-esteem, self-identity, and the development of one's individuality for the sake of achieving happiness.(5) (131, with references)

With regard to the European Union Data Protection Directive (1995), she writes,

Nonetheless, beyond the initial comparison offered here between the NESH Guidelines and the U.S. AAAS report, additional

> The DPD explicitly states that "data-processing systems are designed to serve man." With this in mind, the DPD finds its moral basis in the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, specifically in this Convention's statement that "everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence." These words, particularly the mention of 'correspondence,' ring of the language of the Fourth Amendment and privacy construed as the 'right to be left alone.' They are also though suggestive of the constitutional 'zone of privacy' that Justice Douglas argued for in the Griswold decision. *The moral values underlying the DPD can accordingly be tied in both to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, and to the US Constitution.* (132: emphasis added, CE)

support for my claim that the U.S. approach is more consequentialist in contrast with a more deontological European approach may be seen in the different approaches each takes to laws concerning e-commerce and e-consumers. Briefly, U.S. law places the burden of privacy protection first of all on the *consumer* -placing corporate "rights" to gather information on consumers ahead of individual rights. By contrast, the E.U. Data Protection Act, as noted above, places priority on protecting individual privacy rights over corporations' and governments' interests in collecting information on individuals. See John R. Aguilar ("Over the Rainbow: European and American Consumer Protection Policy and Remedy Conflicts on the Internet and a Possible Solution," *International Journal of Communications of Law and Policy* (Issue 4, Winter 1999/2000, 1-57) extensively documents this contrast: see especially section III, "E-Commerce Concerns and the Cultural Battle Waging Between the EU and US" (11ff.)

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT NOTE CARD

As the numbers of people across the globe that are logging in to virtual worlds or going online for a multitude of reasons continue to increase, it is also increasingly important to understand how new digital media technologies can actually create, strengthen or weaken our ties to others from a personal, local and global perspective. To that end, University of Florida doctoral student Tredi Felisimo is using the virtual world Second Life to better understand these ties. Her research is focused on relationships (of all sorts) experienced in this virtual world.

Tredi is in search of willing participants for her research. As a participant, you will be asked to take part in a private interview. The interview will be conducted completely in private chat in a private location in Second Life and shouldn't take more than an hour. The text will be logged for analysis. The interview will cover a broad range of topics regarding your experience in Second Life. There are no right or wrong answers; simply your interpretation of your own personal experiences. Your avatar identity will be kept confidential as your information will be assigned a code number. No one including Tredi will ask for your RL identity.

If you are so inclined to be part of this research, please contact Tredi Felisimo by sending her a notecard (as IMs get capped) or via email at Tredi08@gmail.com to schedule an interview.

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

Protocol Title: Exploring the media effects of 3-D immersive worlds and how they impact both virtual and real social capital

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

As the numbers of people across the globe that are logging in to virtual worlds or going online for a multitude of reasons continue to increase, it will be increasingly important to understand how new digital media technologies can actually both create and strengthen social capital from a local and global perspective and on an interpersonal level. To that end, this research will explore the influence of virtual presence on the strength of ties and development of social capital (including the development of trust) in the 3-D immersive worlds of the virtual realm, specifically using the virtual world *Second Life*. This research will focus on social capital within friendships, romantic relationships and marriage as developed or dissolved in both their virtual and real lives simultaneously as a direct result of experience in this virtual world.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

As a participant, you will be participating in a private interview between yourself and the researcher. The interview will be conducted completely in private chat in a private location in Second Life. The text will be logged for analysis. The interview will cover a broad range of topics regarding your experience in Second Life. There are no right or wrong answers; simply your interpretation of your own personal experiences.

Time required:

Approximately 1 hour

Risks and Benefits:

There is no anticipated risk involved in this research. However, in addition to better understanding of the reasons why people participate in virtual communities, this research will help understand emerging communication theory. As we explore the changing nature of mass media in its new technological form, we can understand how mass and interpersonal communication are blending and how it changes the way we trust the information and relationships that evolve in the virtual environment.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for involvement in this research.

Confidentiality:

Your avatar identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. No one including myself will know your actual identity.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Donna Z. Davis, PhD Candidate, College of Journalism and Communications,

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; phone 392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

If you give your consent to participate in the study, please return this note card to Tredi Felisimo in Second Life, renaming it “study participant.” You will then be contacted to schedule time for an “in-world” interview.

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE/PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Project: Identity and Trust Development within Relationships in Virtual Worlds as Compared to Real World Relationships

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Donna Davis (Avatar: Tredi Felisimo)

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

_____ On a scale of 1-10, how stylized was the avatar (including skin, shape, hair)?

(Briefly describe the project and remind the interviewee that the conversation will be recorded)

Thanks again so much for agreeing to participate in this research. A reminder, all information you share with me today will be kept confidential. We'll be communicating in text, if that's ok with you. As such and to avoid confusion, if you'd please conclude an answer with ** so I know you're done, that would be great.

If I think you're still typing, I won't typically interrupt.

Real life gender: _____ Male _____ Female

Avatar gender: _____ Male _____ Female _____ Gender neutral _____ both (multiple avatars and "skins")

Real life relationship status: _____ Married _____ Single _____ Separated _____ Divorced _____ in a relationship (other than marriage – if yes, please explain)

Second Life relationship status: _____ Partnered _____ Single _____ in a relationship but not partnered

_____ Age

Education level is high school (graduate?), some college, college degree, advanced degree, professional degree?

In which country do you reside?

_____ On a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 represents the most amount of time spent in virtual worlds or MMORPG's (such as World of Warcraft), how experienced would you consider yourself in virtual worlds?

Questions:

1. Tell me a little about your typical day.

2. (assuming he/she has told me he/she spends time in Second Life….) Tell me about your Second Life.

3. What attracted you to Second Life or any other virtual world and how does it fit in your life (i.e. an entertainment medium, social space, work, research, part of blend of other media consumption, such as TV, movies, etc)?

As you've found yourself spending time in SL, what time did it replace in RL?

4. What are the types of things you like to do in-world?

5. Tell me about the social interactions you have here.

6. How do you feel about revealing your real life information to someone you've met in-world? Talk to me about a time you remember most.

a. When creating your avatar, what type of image did you want to create for your virtual "self"?

7. Tell me about some of the people have you met in Second Life and your observations of them. Also, how you expect them to represent "themselves" either through avi, or in the information they share about themselves. Do you expect them to be "real" in either way?

8. Talk to me about the connections you've made here.

Probe:
a. Have you "partnered" or married anyone in SL?

b. Have you ever met anyone from SL in RL?

c. If so, how closely did they meet what you had expected?

9. What do you find to be the biggest challenges about those relationships? Give me an example.

Probe: Talk to me about trust in this environment.

10. What are the benefits you've experienced from these relationships?

11. How would you say they compare to your real life relationships?

For the sake of exploring interviews in SL, did you find meeting virtually and in text create any challenges or did it impact your responses in a positive or negative way? Was it comfortable and "natural" for you?

Can you think of anything you'd like to add that we didn't cover?

(Thank the participant for their time and reassure him/her that their responses to this or any future interview will be confidential.)

APPENDIX E
SAMPLE RELATIONSHIP GROUP DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Topic	
Acuminous	Posted - 5/3/2009 6:33:54 PM Acuminous Watanabe: Welcome everyone to the Baobab Academy and Cultural Center! [19:08] Indea Vaher: Hi Emerald [19:08] Avatar EE: thank you very much Acuminous. [19:08] Acuminous Watanabe: Thanks to owner, and group member Chan DejaVu for hosting our discussion here. [19:08] Emerald Ishtari: Heyy there Indea how are you today? [19:08] Acuminous Watanabe: The Academy is host to cultural displays and discussions like ours tonight [19:09] Acuminous Watanabe: as such Chan has asked that I announce a new series upcoming :)) [19:09] Acuminous Watanabe: Tamsin Barzane will begin talks here on April 2nd on African art. She will discuss how to see encoded culture. [19:09] Acuminous Watanabe: This introduction will examine some basics that speak to status, relationships, and real life behavior, and how these were adapted to art. It's an informal pictorial lecture with summaries in French and English. Free art gift to visitors! So mark your calendars! :)) [19:09] Shari Gravois: Hi Exodicy [19:09] Indea Vaher: great [19:09] Exodicy Lane: Hi Shari [19:09] Acuminous Watanabe: Our discussion tonight is chat based so that a transcript is available for members who are unable to attend, please be aware that voice capabilities are not enabled tonight. [19:10] Shari Gravois: Have you been to one of these meetings before [19:10] Acuminous Watanabe: For those of you who are new to our discussion WELCOME! [19:10] Exodicy Lane: oh yes, several [19:10] Acuminous Watanabe: You'll find that we are a wonderfully diverse group, and as such a variety of opinions, perceptions and personality styles keep these gatherings lively, entertaining, but most importantly informative. [19:10] Shari Gravois: any good? [19:10] Acuminous Watanabe: The discussions can get rather chatty, especially when it is no topic/open floor as is planned for tonight... [19:11] Acuminous Watanabe: so just a few guidelines before we begin [19:11] Exodicy Lane: yes ;-), very interesting [19:11] Acuminous Watanabe: The first is that this is meant to be a supportive forum where we are each able to learn from the experience of others...even if we don't agree [19:11] Acuminous Watanabe: so please be mindful of this and respond to other participants in a way we all can hear and be receptive [19:11] Acuminous Watanabe: also, please conclude your comments with **, so we are not confused about when you have finished your question/comment. [19:12] Acuminous Watanabe: Although the forum is open, please offer topics relevant to our group mission of improving relationships in SL & RL... [19:12] Acuminous Watanabe: if things start to move away from "relationships" generally speaking, I'll do my best to guide us back to a dialogue that will continue our growth in this area. :)) [19:12] Group Member Three (GM3): Hello Everyone [19:12] Acuminous Watanabe: We have had griefers in the past, so if you are being harassed in IM, please let Chan know, she'll handle them as fast as she can.

	[19:13] Conundrum Aristocrat: hello (GM3) [19:13] Digitus Camel: OR ME.... i LOVE DEALING WITH GRIEFERS [19:13] Digitus Camel: OOPS [19:13] Digitus Camel: sorry caps lock [19:13] Acuminous Watanabe: There are also group GUIDES around the room wearing tags, they will assist me in the discussion and can respond to concerns about griefers and so forth so I may focus on local chat. [19:13] (GM3): Hi Conundrum [19:13] Acuminous Watanabe: Lastly I want to make everyone aware that this discussion is logged so that a transcript is available. [19:13] Acuminous Watanabe: If you want your comments anonymous, please let me know after the discussion and I'd be happy to do so. [19:14] Acuminous Watanabe: Any general questions before we begin?** [19:15] Acuminous Watanabe: Great :)) [19:15] Acuminous Watanabe: The floor is OPEN, who has a question or topic they would like to share?** [19:15] Acuminous Watanabe: or experience** [19:16] Acuminous Watanabe: Not everyone at once, I'm ADD: ** [19:16] (GM3-D): LOL [19:16] Lizzy Werefox: lol Acu [19:16] Digitus Camel: hahahahahahaha!!!!! [19:16] (GM3): LOL [19:16] Avatar EE: I have question [19:16] Acuminous Watanabe chuckles [19:16] (GM3-D): never heard this group so QUIET!! [19:16] Acuminous Watanabe: Yes Avatar EE? [19:16] Conundrum Aristocrat: burp** [19:16] (GM3-D): we must all be very content in our relationships :-) [19:16] Group Member Four (GM4): lol not [19:16] Avatar EE: (GM4)s me standing behind this sign without a shirt make me look nekked? [19:16] Emerald Ishtari: LOL Avatar EE** [19:17] Acuminous Watanabe: lol Avatar EE [19:17] Digitus Camel: yah..... thats it.... that would shut me right up! [19:17] Lizzy Werefox: lol [19:17] Acuminous Watanabe: uhm, yes it does actually** [19:17] Group Member One (GM1): please don't show us...** [19:17] Acuminous Watanabe: (GM4), did you want to share something? [19:17] Avatar EE: I mean How most feel being a Nekked Avatar? [19:18] (GM4): well anybody here have sex in sl i have not and the hyman connection seems like it would be missing** [19:18] (GM4): human [19:18] (GM4): omg** [19:18] (GM4): lol [19:18] Acuminous Watanabe: Hmm Avatar EE, that's an interesting question...when I was a noob, I was VERY subconscious about that, especially after learning about camera capabilities (chuckle)** [19:18] Lizzy Werefox: i like being naked at home [19:18] Lizzy Werefox: hehe [19:18] Digitus Camel: the hyman is something Xcite hasn't built yet I would think [19:18] Emerald Ishtari: LOL Digitus** [19:18] Conundrum Aristocrat: me too, but then i spent 600 lindens and suddenly my subconsious was proud as a peakcock [19:18] (GM4): IT WAS A TYPO!!!** [19:18] Acuminous Watanabe chuckles @ (GM4)

	[19:19] Niehma Benoir: she meant human [19:19] (GM4): LOL [19:19] Digitus Camel: it was a world class typo too [19:19] Niehma Benoir: human [19:19] (GM4): YA [19:19] Papi Melson: you need to be close to the person your with [19:19] (GM4): LOL [19:19] Digitus Camel grins! [19:19] Acuminous Watanabe: so (GM4) you are asking about the impact of sexual intimacy on our RL humans?** [19:19] Papi Melson: for it to be fulfilling [19:19] Lizzy Werefox: hey babe, uncross your legs before peeps get wrong idea [19:19] Niehma Benoir: she has never had sex here and wants to know if it is real [19:19] (GM4): WELL U CAN MAKE THAT ANONYMOUS LATER PLEASE [19:19] Acuminous Watanabe smiles sure (GM4), no problem** [19:20] Conundrum Aristocrat: lol [19:20] (GM4): NO, I AM ASKING FLESH HUMAN CONTACT MISSING IN SL SEX** [19:20] iwan Sweetwater: i think the experience will be as intense as you let it be [19:20] (GM4): ?? [19:20] Acuminous Watanabe: I think (GM4) and Avatar EE may be taking us down a similar path here tonight [19:20] Acuminous Watanabe: the idea of intimacy in virtual relationships and the impact in RL** [19:20] Kenya Karillion: Yes the Human touch is missing here in sl [19:20] Emerald Ishtari: The human body be it RL or SL is a work of art by the Creator or the designer. There is nothing to be ashamed of even if you are physically lacking or you performance is off** [19:20] iwan Sweetwater: all about whom you are dealing with [19:20] Papi Melson: sex is in the mind not the body [19:20] (GM1): doesn't the power come from the mind anyway? [19:20] Digitus Camel: but the imagination can overcome the lack of other senses rather quickly [19:21] Indea Vaher: but i here people say they really 'touch' and fall deeply in love [19:21] Digitus Camel: yes they do [19:21] Papi Melson: yes they do [19:21] Kenya Karillion: Yes intimacy is in the mind but all humans need the sense of touch [19:21] Indea Vaher: *hear** [19:21] (GM4): YeSaH! I AGREE AND WHEN HAVING SEX WITH PARTNER I WANT TO SHARE WITH PARTNER [19:21] (GM4): 88 [19:21] Lizzy Werefox: yes, i think they do [19:21] (GM4): IN SL SEEMS LEFT EMPYT [19:21] Kenya Karillion: to see ...feel...smell....hear.... [19:21] iwan Sweetwater: i think the aspect of rp adds to the experience for people [19:21] Group Member Two (GM2): I think it is funny to hear people say they fall deeply....but then they break up two weeks later. [19:22] (GM4): YeSaH! KENYA [19:22] Avatar EE: doesn't everything start in the mind first, how you see things being judged by the mind. [19:22] Indea Vaher: with all the weddings going on here somebody must be feeling something real!** [19:22] Papi Melson: if you only have one partner, sex in SL can be a beautiful thing [19:22] Acuminous Watanabe: I think that the brain is the body's largest sex organ...it is not abnormal to be sexually aroused by words and pictures only... just ask Hugh Heffner and that Hustler guy.. I forget his name**

[19:22] (GM4): YeSaH! BUT SEX MORE THAN MIND EXPERIENCE IT BODY TOO
[19:22] (GM3-D): I guess I would have to ask if love can exist without physical contact? I think so**
[19:22] (GM4): WHAT HAPPEN TO BODY IN AVI
[19:22] iwan Sweetwater: true @ acu
[19:23] Emerald Ishtari: I am feeling the wonder of them spending their lindens with me to build their weddings LOL**
[19:23] Avatar EE: With all the divorces and re-marriages in America, it only shows that we are indeed the land of the Free and home of the Brave!
[19:23] Chan Dejavu: i think so too (GM3-D)**
[19:23] (GM4): IT HAPPEN IN YOUR MIND AND BODY FEELS ALONE AT HOME
[19:23] Papi Melson: no
[19:23] Conundrum Aristocrat: lol Avatar EE
[19:23] Indea Vaher: lol@Emerald
[19:23] (GM4): DIVORCE SAD ..NOT BRAVE:(
[19:23] Chan Dejavu wonders if (GM4) knows that typing in all caps means yelling??**
[19:24] Niehma Benoir: no there is a very deep connection when it is with some one you care about
[19:24] (GM4): no problem, I am nearsighted
[19:24] Acuminous Watanabe: yes (GM4), for some... but I think its more about what you allow the experience to be for you. Some people truly have a hard time finding satisfaction with only visuals, and that's ok too :))**
[19:24] (GM3-D): People have had sex without love for ages, to think of it from the flip side**
[19:24] (GM4): thanx for your thoughts all:)
[19:24] Papi Melson: thats fun too
[19:24] Kenya Karillion: Yes it can be beautiful here but eventually wont one get frustrated and desire more of a person?
[19:24] Emerald Ishtari: Exactly (GM3-D)**
[19:25] Conundrum Aristocrat: yes Kenya
[19:25] Avatar EE: Sex a physical sensation, Love an emotional feeling.
[19:25] Conundrum Aristocrat: at least i think so..
[19:25] Kenya Karillion: yes
[19:25] iwan Sweetwater: not necessarily @ Avatar EE
[19:25] Niehma Benoir: it depends on how far you are willing to go
[19:25] (GM3-D): what is it you're thinking Con?
[19:25] iwan Sweetwater: sex is a very emotional thing
[19:26] Acuminous Watanabe: that' happens a lot as well Kenya.. the desire for more intimacy... isn't that the way it always is when something feels good? we want MORE of it and more often :)**
[19:26] RaveynMajic Eiren: well, no matter how far you go, you are only getting a fraction of the person on screen.
[19:26] Avatar EE: It's all the same energy..just manifested via different parts of you.
[19:26] Conundrum Aristocrat: just agreeing with what Kenya said, about lasting, or tiring
[19:26] Avatar EE: what is the quality of that energy..it's wants to unite with it's counterpart
[19:26] Papi Melson: as in RL ,ppl need to take there time to find the right person, they need to know a person before they can consider sex
[19:26] (GM4): well good following conversation between two people engaging might add to sex experience in sl but the typing lol unless you have voice
[19:26] Avatar EE: body to body, heart to heart
[19:26] Conundrum Aristocrat: well i guess i can say it best with a short poem if anyone intersted, kinda tells my view
[19:26] (GM4): YeSaH! papi that right
[19:27] Acuminous Watanabe: I agree Raven**
[19:27] (GM2): Yes, i feel sex is very emotional too.....im with someone now....that makes

	me so happy in so many ways....im scared to have sex with him now.....because it just makes me want him more in rl. [19:27] Lizzy Werefox: yes honey [19:27] Lizzy Werefox: read your poem [19:27] (GM4): poem yes [19:27] Avatar EE: You have all heard that saying, body ,soul and spirit....even that glorious ecstatic experience is that same energy. sex, love , bliss [19:27] RaveynMajic Eiren: *listens for poem* yes do share. [19:28] (GM1): Everyone defines "love" differently -- some define it by giving sex, yes?** [19:28] Conundrum Aristocrat: ok [19:28] Acuminous Watanabe: Ooo a Con poem [19:28] Digitus Camel: personally I avoid it in SL it causes exactly that, emotional complications that seep into RL [19:28] Acuminous Watanabe listens** [19:28] Papi Melson: some times the distance in RL is what make SL so good [19:28] Emerald Ishtari: LOL Avatar EE as funny as that sounds to some it is so very true* [19:28] Kenya Karillion: I agree with (GM2) [19:28] Conundrum Aristocrat: Frivolous encounter with restrained passion The bit so restrictive Direction forbidden Bred to run Manipulation yields a harder tug Forced to canter So oblivious to the delicate rider Flavor of the oats diminish [19:28] (GM4): that is deep poetic [19:28] Avatar EE: but humans are fragmented..so one part doesn't always connect with the others...so..sure..you can sex without love....or vice a versa [19:28] Indea Vaher: agree w/Papi [19:29] Emerald Ishtari: Avatar EE you are 100% correct [19:29] Elliott Troglodite: is there something wrong with wanting more in RL? even if boundries are set and it's understood it won't happen. are you really in love with someone on SL if you have absolutely no interest in them in RL? [19:29] Acuminous Watanabe: Very nice Con, I perceive from your poem that that the fantasy of SL makes it seem as though you would explode with RL sex... but then there is that possibility that its the same ole crackers you're used to... such an SL conundrum! The fantasy makes it SO good! :))** [19:29] Papi Melson: SL can bring you closer to the person you love ,than RL can at time [19:29] iwan Sweetwater: good question @ elliot [19:30] Digitus Camel: not wrong as such just rather dangerous [19:30] Lizzy Werefox: how can you be inlove without interest? [19:30] RaveynMajic Eiren: i'd rather have that integrated experience and think that is what leads to boredom/tiring here of sl relationships..it's not integrated as it can be in rl. *end* [19:30] Cloud Galbraith: I think some of the relational issues in SL are becuz in RL we're capable of using our senses to aid in our assessment of a person. In SL that ability is limited** [19:30] Niehma Benoir: sl is a great place to get to know someone even more intimately than in real life [19:31] Kenya Karillion: yes I have found most men wanting a relationship with me in SL are married..... [19:31] RaveynMajic Eiren: niehman how so--more intimately?* [19:31] (GM4): yes cloud senses very important to me [19:31] Stellar Pleides: very true, Niehma, we can be more open here [19:31] Lizzy Werefox: good point Neimha

[19:31] Acuminous Watanabe: Elliott I only think there is something "wrong" if you interpret it that way. If you have that understanding...that RL is not a possibility, then you choose to stay in the relationship or not based on what it is you feel you need. its about asking, what will fulfill me and then walking THAT path in pursuit of relationship, IMO ;) **
[19:31] Chan Dejavu: SL in itself is about "the fantasy" A Fantasy fulfilled can be very intense whether virtual or real**
[19:31] Niehma Benoir: because there is a screen you are free to let the real you out cause if they dont like it you can jet
[19:31] Papi Melson: you can tell alot about a person , just from the words they type
[19:32] iwan Sweetwater: but isn't it really hard to get to truly know someone here, because you can be what you like here and hide your true self behind the anonymity of the internet
[19:32] Conundrum Aristocrat: I don't think its better to get to know someone in SL, I think proper term is easier
[19:32] Kenya Karillion: not really Papi ppl can and will decieve here
[19:32] RaveynMajic Eiren: lol niehman..i guess i a make it a point to be the real me off screen too--so don't really experience it as being more intimate here. **
[19:32] iwan Sweetwater: otherwords, always have your best face on
[19:32] (GM4): papi yjat comment makes people think:)^^
[19:32] Digitus Camel: true, but some are better at typing than others, I have been outright manuiplated a couple of times
[19:32] Niehma Benoir: because you are not face to face you can be more open
[19:32] Conundrum Aristocrat: or maybe more ability to explore
[19:32] Conundrum Aristocrat: and find what may work in Real
[19:32] Papi Melson: why?????
[19:32] Kenya Karillion: yes Digitus
[19:32] (GM2): In a way i feel it isnt love.....because everything we see her is fake.....we do not look like this in rl.....nor do some of us act this way in rl.....we are just in love with a cartoon.
[19:33] Kenya Karillion: ditto (GM2)
[19:33] Elliott Troglodite: Acu that is dead on. it comes down to both people knowing what they want and need, and having an understanding.
[19:33] (GM3-D): we also get to know what that person WANTS us to know, the person they experience themselves to be in SL, which may be very different than the person who is dealing each day with basic realities**
[19:33] (GM4): i have sl man tell me he love me more if i change color my skin...
[19:33] Indea Vaher: I think it IS as reality,,,but as an alternate reality.
[19:33] Niehma Benoir: hold up wait a minute
[19:33] Papi Melson: not true for all ppl
[19:33] RaveynMajic Eiren: good point (GM2)...hehehe allthough some of us do look more like our AV
[19:33] Niehma Benoir: the real you (GM4)s come thru
[19:33] Acuminous Watanabe: iwan, i think its about what your expectations are...if you have no intentions of going RL, then it really doesn't matter as much who is behind the screen...it is about the connection. If however you hope to find your RL connection here, you should be up front about that early in the relationship so that your partner is clear and can choose to move forward or not. You'll save yourself a lot of heart ache that way :))**
[19:33] Kenya Karillion: ditto (GM3-D)
[19:33] Niehma Benoir: and these are not cartoons
[19:34] Indea Vaher: as an alternate reality we exist on a different plane of existance..
[19:34] Niehma Benoir: and this is not a game
[19:34] Digitus Camel: my avitar is a serious exageration based on my rl apearance but blown out of proportion
[19:34] (GM4): i will not..he can go find a color he love then...i am real person sharing my fantasy
[19:34] (GM1): My avi was created specifically to please my partner, his fantasy**

	[19:34] Elliott Troglodite: (GM2), maybe it is even more real because you aren't falling in love with what someone can not control like their face or mannerisms, but with what they choose to be [19:34] Emerald Ishtari: You are so very correct (GM3-D). All too often the folks in SL put on a facade of being genuine and true, when in actuality they are really out for self** [19:34] Shari Gravois: It is a game and we shouldn't take it too seriously [19:34] Lizzy Werefox: lol Digits [19:34] (GM4): i like to be true to myself [19:34] RaveynMajic Eiren: for some it is a game..for others it is way of connecting, dependis on expectations. ** [19:34] (GM3-D): maybe, Em, we are more true here?** [19:35] (GM4): people can like me for who i am [19:35] (GM3-D): in some regards** [19:35] Avatar EE: We can project ourselves in SL, it's not physical, but that is not to say our thoughts and feelings is a cartoon. [19:35] Kenya Karillion: yes Raven [19:35] Stellar Pleides: SL Doesn't have to be a game & *shouldn't* be a game when involving emotions ** [19:35] (GM2): Yes, you are correct elliott. [19:35] (GM4): ye s stellar [19:35] (GM3-D): I have always said... I yam... whad I yam [19:35] Digitus Camel: it is NOT a game though, I think of SL as a place like any other place and its full of people, they are just able to look like anything they want [19:35] (GM3-D): take it or leave it... I'm me** [19:35] Chan Dejavu: for some it starts as a game and ends as a rl connection** [19:35] Kenya Karillion: but it is for some Stellar [19:35] RaveynMajic Eiren: yes Avatar EE..it can be a soul projection into the av...the essence of ourselves as represented here.** [19:35] (GM4): ye s tedri [19:35] Niehma Benoir: ppl have gotten hurt baddly here in sl [19:35] Emerald Ishtari: I think that lot o the people in SL in general and probably some in this very room are as fake as a $3 bill.** [19:36] (GM4): ye s they have niehma [19:36] Lizzy Werefox: and many often times develop relationships with others and real feelings, but find the other isn't interested in the same way [19:36] (GM4): as in rl too [19:36] Shari Gravois: If you get emotionally involved here it is getting involved with a fantasy [19:36] Stellar Pleides: True Digitus, but we must be on guard for those who merely "play" here and abuse emotions ** [19:36] (GM4): it speaks of a persons character [19:36] Lizzy Werefox: very true Stellar [19:36] Niehma Benoir: it is not a fantasy [19:36] Lizzy Werefox: some people get confused with rl and sl [19:36] (GM1): I am often treated as a "Barbie" but there is nothing fake about me, behind my look [19:36] RaveynMajic Eiren: true sellar ** [19:36] Chan Dejavu: yes, indulging in a fantasy of the mind** [19:36] Kenya Karillion: and some take it away from here with Skype and web cams. [19:37] Niehma Benoir: read the news some rl weddings have been due to sl [19:37] Digitus Camel: the problem is that the people who treat it like a game tend to harm the people who treat it as a place, weather intentional or not, as game players they don't have to care about the impact they have, in RL they would be called sciociopaths (spelling?) [19:37] Lizzy Werefox: yep

	[19:37] Avatar EE: What are we doing here...aren't we right now projecting our minds to each other...is that real or not..which begs the question ..are we real? [19:37] Acuminous Watanabe: Shari, do you think people can find a RL partner via online? Dating services, and such?** [19:37] (GM3-D): 1 in 8 marriages last year originated "online" [19:37] RaveynMajic Eiren: yes and some are not fantasies but folks just being themselves. ** [19:37] Kenya Karillion: :) Avatar EE [19:37] (GM2): i agree with digitus [19:37] Indea Vaher: I like the fantasy aspect..there are things i might do here i would never do in rl.. [19:37] Digitus Camel: yes it is Avatar EE [19:37] (GM4): sl mean something different to everyone...some here because they want to meet someone,...some just want to enjoy sls diverities [19:37] Acuminous Watanabe: Good point Avatar EE :)** [19:37] Shari Gravois: I believe you can find a partner in sl....but keep your eyes open [19:37] Lizzy Werefox: yes we are real, but some people have hard time separating rl and sl feelings [19:38] Stellar Pleides: That's why, if we bring ourselves here, we need to be aware that some "sociopaths" are also here [19:38] Avatar EE: I have heard that the longer your are in SL , the more real you become. Not so much a game as a relationship, Thus why we are here. [19:38] Stellar Pleides nods to Avatar EE [19:38] (GM3-D): Feelings are feelings, and they belong to the one human behind the keyboard** [19:38] RaveynMajic Eiren: indeed stellar--just like in the real world. ** [19:38] Stellar Pleides: relationships are why I stay [19:38] Niehma Benoir: you an find real love in sl [19:38] Stellar Pleides: Yes, Raveyn [19:38] Papi Melson: i think most ppl come to SL just to find the quallity of friend ,that they can,t find in RL. and in SL ,if you don't like someone you don't have to avoid them, just take them off you friends list [19:38] Digitus Camel: I am well past the point of separating SL/RL emotions [19:38] Acuminous Watanabe: Yes, can't separate the human from the avatar... feelings are feelings** [19:38] Cheeto Eclipse: To love in SL I don't believe is truly possible. I believe those that love here love the ideal and the image of what their partners wish they were in RL. However at the end of the day that tis no different than buying a knock off painting, knowing it's a knock off painting and still trying to show the same enthusiasm as you would for the real one.** [19:38] Digitus Camel: I cant and dont anymore, it simply (GM4)sn't work [19:39] Emerald Ishtari: Great point Cheeto** [19:39] RaveynMajic Eiren: cheeto, i'd have to agree, because again in SL you are oinly getting a part of the person..not the whole person that exists in real life. ** [19:39] Acuminous Watanabe: Interestingly stated Cheeto. I agree with you in some regard** [19:39] (GM4): eclipse that is harsh...experience different for all [19:39] Spike Warwillow: you can love in SL sometime love in a game is all you can do because of circumstances outside interfering and so ya take what ya can get sorta deal and be happy ** [19:40] Lizzy Werefox: but as metioned before, there are things people can do outside the game to know one another [19:40] (GM3-D): back to the question of defining love [19:40] iwan Sweetwater: i think you can love in sl, but how (GM4)s it really translate to rl, what happens when you meet the person on the other end and they DON"T go scuba

	diving and DON"T go out dancing and DON"T have a great body and so on and so forth [19:40] Niehma Benoir: in rl you only get part of the person [19:40] Indea Vaher: agree w/Iwan [19:40] Acuminous Watanabe: Lizzy what are your thoughts about that?** [19:40] iwan Sweetwater: how (GM4)s that impact you then? ** [19:40] (GM3-D): (GM4)s anyone here find it easier to talk to their SL friends/lovers than RL friends/lovers?** [19:40] Stellar Pleides agrees with Niehma [19:40] Indea Vaher: I might dance on a table in SL, but never do that in rl!! [19:40] RaveynMajic Eiren: niehman that is true of both people are not giving and opoen of themselves in real life... ** [19:41] Lizzy Werefox: about having other alternatives to getting to know someone? [19:41] Lizzy Werefox: acu? [19:41] Acuminous Watanabe: yes Liz** [19:41] RaveynMajic Eiren: as an autehntic person in real life i tend to attract people who are real with me there and here. ** [19:41] Emerald Ishtari: Hahahahhahaa Indea I do but in private only!** [19:41] Stellar Pleides: its a gradual process, first here then there (RL) if you choose [19:41] Camilla Delvalle: I dont you can hide your true character for very long i SL, even if you can lie about details, but your personality will probably shine through. [19:41] Conundrum Aristocrat: waves at cheeto [19:41] Lizzy Werefox: we have phones [19:41] Acuminous Watanabe: I agree Camilla** [19:41] Lizzy Werefox: we have cams, text messaging [19:41] Digitus Camel: Love is love, weather someone thinks there is idealization going on or not is irrelevant, its still love, and assuming that because we can look how we like there is going to affect how we feel is seriously underestimating the person who is in love [19:41] Niehma Benoir: anybody with half a brain cell konows that ppl are not ALL THIS BEAUTIFUL in rl [19:41] Lizzy Werefox: so if someone is truley interested in someone else, there are other ways to get to know them [19:41] (GM2): i agree with digtus [19:41] Acuminous Watanabe: Mmm nicely said Digi :))** [19:42] Kenya Karillion: ooh yes [19:42] Papi Melson: that's how we started [19:42] iwan Sweetwater: i agree @ Lizzy [19:42] Cheeto Eclipse waves back at Con [19:42] Acuminous Watanabe: <~~~is beautiful inside :)) [19:42] Niehma Benoir: that part is make believe for sure [19:42] Kenya Karillion: Ppl here ideally fall in love with a person's personality not looks [19:42] Digitus Camel: and any one who HAS fallen in love in RL will know instantly what is happening to them in SL, there is no mistaking that feeling [19:42] iwan Sweetwater: but the human mind is so complex and responds differently to different stimuli [19:42] Lizzy Werefox: of course, but we have options [19:42] Kenya Karillion: but when rl steps in...? [19:43] Digitus Camel: <--- is bitchy in the morning with out coffee in RL/SL [19:43] Lizzy Werefox: your'e right Digitus [19:43] (GM4): that makes good sense camel** [19:43] Kenya Karillion: looks do matter for some [19:43] (GM2): (@_@) Love it!! (@_@) [19:43] (GM2): -> LOL <- [19:43] Stellar Pleides: RL should be intro'd bit by bit via SL, I think ** [19:43] RaveynMajic Eiren: yes the human mind falls for what it resonates for visually as well as in the heart. **

[19:43] Emerald Ishtari: LOL Digitus me too
[19:43] iwan Sweetwater: like physical contact, in rl, can change ones perceptoion in a heartbeat
[19:43] Niehma Benoir: it is the act of getting to know someone that stuns us and takes us by surprise
[19:43] Lizzy Werefox: yes Stllar
[19:43] Niehma Benoir: it is not all about looks
[19:43] Digitus Camel: yes it is
[19:43] Niehma Benoir: it is a deeper connection
[19:43] iwan Sweetwater: pardon my typos
[19:43] (GM4): i do not care what an avi looks like it is the personality i am attracted to or not...
[19:44] (GM3-D): How about people who fall in "love" at first sight in RL? Is THAT true love?**
[19:44] Digitus Camel: to Niehama sorry
[19:44] RaveynMajic Eiren: exact niehma..it's a combination of things. **
[19:44] Conundrum Aristocrat: of course it can iwan, but so can a third date
[19:44] Papi Melson: even though i look good RL LOL
[19:44] Lizzy Werefox: lol con
[19:44] RaveynMajic Eiren: (GM3-D)..tha'ts falling in love with what they see and experience not necessairly the person. **
[19:44] (GM4): i have very good imp friends and demons...and human etc
[19:44] Acuminous Watanabe: LOL Papi**
[19:44] Niehma Benoir: than the superfical
[19:44] (GM3-D): my point, Raveyn**
[19:44] Indea Vaher: I think we do play a role here, the role our AVI's dictate..some things are real, but it's like a dream where I can fly and see through walls
[19:45] Indea Vaher: none of this is real
[19:45] Niehma Benoir: yes Papi is cute in rl also
[19:45] Conundrum Aristocrat: plenty of disadvantages i agree, but benefit is no loud smokey bar to try and get to know someone
[19:45] (GM3-D): so, is love "less" real here, because we cant see what is "real"?*
[19:45] iwan Sweetwater: yes, that's True con
[19:45] Stellar Pleides: I am real and so my friendships are real **
[19:45] Emerald Ishtari: Question just brought tome on the telephone...how can one get to know another when one or both is not bringing to the table the representative that is seated at the keyboard.**
[19:45] Acuminous Watanabe: I think the feelings are real Indea... just look (or listen) around the room**
[19:45] Lizzy Werefox: yes baby, your right
[19:45] Niehma Benoir: no it is more real here
[19:45] Indea Vaher: but I can like someone, even be infatuated, but just like flying I know it's not reality
[19:45] Digitus Camel: I love people here whos avatars are... well.... unsavory to say the least, but I look past that visual and talk to the person behind the avitar and that changed how they look
[19:45] RaveynMajic Eiren: love is less here because it's falling for an ideal not the real person**
[19:45] (GM4): i think avis are dreams we can fulfill more in sl than i rl because srl has so many barriers ie..money...
[19:45] skyye Anthony: hello everyone
[19:46] Avatar EE: All this love...what is it about love..a search for some identity. That feeling of being attracted to someone, opens you up to look at yourself differently.What we experience flows through us...
[19:46] Lizzy Werefox: hey Skyye

	[19:46] Papi Melson: infacuation is based on looks [19:46] Stellar Pleides: I agree, Niehma, I am more myself in SL and less in RL where I abide by societal rules ** [19:46] Acuminous Watanabe: (GM4), that is such a good point** [19:46] iwan Sweetwater: or as Indea states, may not be Possible past this forum, (meaning sl) [19:46] Papi Melson: love is based on knowing the person [19:46] (GM4): smiles eveyone [19:47] Niehma Benoir: and how do you get to know some one [19:47] RaveynMajic Eiren: stellar, a lot of people are like that in rl..inhibited...in that case SL freess you to be more yourself. ** [19:47] Conundrum Aristocrat: not for sure papi, infautation is based on what is important to person, could be looks, but could be power or money [19:47] Kenya Karillion: Love can be real here for some and not for others.....some are here to play and some are here beacuse they are unfufilled in RL for whatever reason. [19:47] Indea Vaher: you have all this stimulus here, the music and beauty, pose balls everywhere!! [19:47] iwan Sweetwater: I have met many people here that are married or partnered here and Married with children in RL [19:47] Avatar EE: How will you ever come to that point that you think you know someone.? [19:47] Stellar Pleides: exactly Ravyn [19:47] Conundrum Aristocrat: or a certain need they [19:47] (GM4): yes kenya.. [19:47] skyye Anthony: i agree [19:47] Emerald Ishtari: MY Telephone guest states that Raven has a valid point and she asks does Raven realize that it happens in RL too** [19:47] Niehma Benoir: and some also play in rl as well [19:47] Lizzy Werefox: maybe meet them in real Avatar EE [19:47] Stellar Pleides: Avatar EE, I have and I can't explain beyond trust [19:48] Acuminous Watanabe: I think love in SL can be and is real... feelings are feelings. That does not mean that ROMANTIC love would endure in RL, because some portion of the perception is based on fantasy... but what about FRIENDSHIPS [19:48] Acuminous Watanabe: is it possible to love someone you meet in SL and have become close to on a personal level.. a non-romantic love [19:48] Acuminous Watanabe: and still feel that connection in RL?** [19:48] (GM1): How do you know them in RL? Do you love their look? their money? their home? their car? or THEM? [19:48] Cheeto Eclipse likes Cons money lol [19:48] Indea Vaher: your hormones go crazy because you body and mind is stimulated t do so..and then you find someone you relate to and you share the dream [19:48] Conundrum Aristocrat: lol cheeto [19:48] RaveynMajic Eiren: emerald...of course it (GM4)s in real life too. people fall in love with ideals all the time..what they want to see. ** [19:48] pet Karu: i think the each avatar brings the real life person with them. the way they are in RL will eventually show itself in SL [19:48] Elliott Troglodite: looks on sl are an idea that we are putting forward. it's our aesthetic, and it's part of who we are and what we choose to design and create. those ideas are going to influence your love for someone. what are you falling in love with on SL but someone's ideas? [19:48] Indea Vaher: you get high on the chemical connection and like a couple of junkies you get high together!! 19:48] (GM4): real life is about fantasy too.and dreams just different application [19:48] (GM3-D) agrees with Acu heartily!** [19:48] RaveynMajic Eiren: i just think the idealism is increased in SL because of all the visual beauty, exotic backgrounds, fantasies, etc. **

[19:48] iwan Sweetwater: Pass that @ Indea
[19:49] Emerald Ishtari loks over at Cheeto and wishes she would answer Raven herself instead of in my ear :)**
[19:49] Niehma Benoir: in sl you love the core of tha person money looks and posessions dont play into it
[19:49] (GM4): ye s niehma
[19:49] Avatar EE: ah...trust....we come to a point where we believe we know then..all of you have heard...a person can be with someone for years..and they do something...and they..."Ah..NOW , I know how you really are!!"
[19:49] Indea Vaher: agree w/Rave
[19:49] (GM4): ye sAvatar EE that right too
[19:50] RaveynMajic Eiren: niehma that can happen but what if the "core" they are presenting is just made up...? **
[19:50] Conundrum Aristocrat: when real life meetings work out so much as far as love goes, then um wtf is wrong with the world, really, who freaking knows what love is truly, i doubt many of us can define its parameters that make it last a lifetime or none of us would be here now
[19:50] Avatar EE: so that kind of love that has that condition that you know them, comes and goes..yes?
[19:50] Emerald Ishtari: Avatar EE what that tells me is tht there was just a pretense of trust and that the one saying that never really trusted in the firstplace**
[19:50] Lizzy Werefox: ty
[19:50] Lizzy Werefox: Con
[19:50] Conundrum Aristocrat: so in summary, basically who gives a shit if what you feel is right, as long as you feel
[19:50] Lizzy Werefox: said so nicely
[19:50] skyye Anthony: alot of ppl are here in sl out of sheer curiosity. not to find love
[19:50] Elliott Troglodite: a lot of people are saying looks don't matter, but i don't see a lot of ugly avatars in here
[19:50] iwan Sweetwater: there are alot of peope in here that have the same rl hangups that they have in rl, as far as possesions and what you do with yourself here
[19:50] (GM4): love is always being there for someone through thick and thin
[19:50] RaveynMajic Eiren: hehehe amen conondrum! **
[19:51] Avatar EE: Or..accepting them under some condition Emerald
[19:51] Acuminous Watanabe: IMO Con, love is unconditional acceptance...that can absolutely be achieved in SL
[19:51] Acuminous Watanabe: but, it is difficult to sustain, especially if that kind of unconditionality has not been achieve with your SELF**
[19:51] Emerald Ishtari: Cheeto says that I've is being able to wake up in the morn ing with you hair mess, stinky morning breath and fart and still be in lve** and sexy and not slf concious**
[19:51] Emerald Ishtari: <<----just the messenger**
[19:51] Digitus Camel: I have been with Lisa in SL for well over a year now, the same things that happen in RL have happened to us here and we know who and what we are in RL and still we love each other, we have our differences and we work around them and squabble at times, but since she is 1500 miles away and this is how we have to communicate, is this any different than what we would do in RL under the same circumstances? most people conduct long distance relationships over the phone, which I find horrendously limiting, here ar least I can build her roses on valentines day while she watches
[19:51] Cheeto Eclipse: LOL
[19:51] Indea Vaher: I agree with iwan that's true..I am an artist in rl, and I am here as well..
[19:51] RaveynMajic Eiren: elliott, i din't hear people saying looks don't matter but that it's deeper than looks --people are drawn to more than that. **
[19:52] (GM3-D): Well... Elliot... I'm having a big hair day!
[19:52] Indea Vaher: we do bring ourselves in here..to a degree..and maybe some more

	than others [19:52] Digitus Camel: I am in love, I am in love with someone I do KNOW and there is nothing fake about it [19:52] Indea Vaher: Maybe there is no one set answer.. [19:52] Acuminous Watanabe: How beautiful Digi :))** [19:52] skyye Anthony: having said that, if someone finds love(wherever it is) then good for them [19:52] RaveynMajic Eiren: that's beautiful digitus...you all just use Sl as a medium to connect and further your rl connection..that's sound great. ** [19:52] Acuminous Watanabe: LOL (GM3-D)** [19:52] Digitus Camel: the cheese vcake in SL sucks but thats life, it sucks in ohio too I bet [19:53] Acuminous Watanabe: Yes Indea, I agree** [19:53] Cheeto Eclipse: Ohio has yummy cheesecake [19:53] pet Karu: i agree with you Indea. we do explore and push boundaries here [19:53] Conundrum Aristocrat: reality tells me most of us cheer love is so unconditional until someone finds that one condition they soo like to break, then after a while, the unconditional wears off [19:53] Emerald Ishtari: What does cheescake have to do with telling lies in relationships?** [19:53] Indea Vaher: for some it's a game..for others it's real, and for some SL is something in between [19:53] Digitus Camel: it does? [19:53] iwan Sweetwater: i guess we can all agree that the circumstances of our sl existences very to great degrees [19:53] (GM4): we never have to accept un desirable behavior if it is hurtful to another but there is no perfection on either side of the fence ....old but true treat others as you would like to be treated…and if your dream is different than anthers find someone who shares your dream [19:53] pet Karu: a gamer in RL will be a double gamer in SL [19:54] (GM2): cheesecake factory...lol [19:54] Acuminous Watanabe: if "unconditional" wears off.. it was always conditional ;)) ** [19:54] Emerald Ishtari: AMEN PET!!!!!***** [19:54] Conundrum Aristocrat: thats easy to say acu [19:54] iwan Sweetwater: people have different reasons for being here and human contact is the common denominator [19:54] (GM4): i think YeSaH! watanabe [19:54] Digitus Camel: (GM3-D) I think your big hair day is stunning, you should keep it [19:54] Lizzy Werefox: it's been nice guys, but i gotta get my and Con's nursery together and it's getting late [19:54] Acuminous Watanabe: nice (GM4)! :))** [19:54] Emerald Ishtari: Exactly Acu** [19:54] Lizzy Werefox: so good night all [19:54] (GM4): :) [19:54] Conundrum Aristocrat: unconditional works much better when its mutual [19:54] Indea Vaher: I agree. human contact is the common denominator. [19:54] Kenya Karillion: Nite Lizzy [19:54] RaveynMajic Eiren: yes good night all..good discussion! [19:55] pet Karu: peace Lizzy [19:55] (GM3-D): ty digitus! :-)) [19:55] (GM3): Ni Lizzy [19:55] Acuminous Watanabe: iwan, I TOTALLY agree... it is why I do not view SL as a game.. it is no more a game than a stadium is to a football game. [19:55] (GM2): bye lizzy [19:55] Digitus Camel grins [19:55] Acuminous Watanabe: SL is more like a canvas, and we are the painters** [19:55] Camilla Delvalle: Ok, I have a related question. What if you dont want to talk about

	your real life. Can it still be possible to have a serious relationship in SL, with real love? [19:55] pet Karu: well said Acu [19:55] Acuminous Watanabe: TC Lizzy :)) [19:55] Kenya Karillion: ditto Camilla [19:55] skyye Anthony: good question camilla [19:55] (GM3-D): giving unconditionally is not a concept that is nurtured in our culture these days Con** [19:55] iwan Sweetwater: true that [19:56] Indea Vaher: agree w/Acu or an ever unfolding novel that never really ends.. [19:56] iwan Sweetwater: it's a game to some and a social forum to others [19:56] Niehma Benoir: no because a real relationship is based on truth [19:56] (GM4): i fell sl is like having two lives to juggle i take bothe seriously and an commited to my endeavors in both and try to haVE fun...sun does not always shine we must have rain too [19:56] Emerald Ishtari: Tredi I agree with you to anextent** [19:56] Avatar EE: I think it all depends on what part of you is doing loving. The more sensual part has conditions , and friendship, love of friends has less..and that spirit love, would be like Jesus or Buddha. love unconditionally all. [19:56] iwan Sweetwater: the two when they meet do not mix very well i guess [19:56] Elliott Troglodite: i think it would be very hard not to talk about RL simply because there are a limited number of topics in the world without it. i really don't know how to answer that camilla [19:57] (GM3-D): reminds me of the story Acu told last time about the warm fuzzies. I hope that I give unconditionally, without expectation of receiving it in return** [19:57] Digitus Camel: Camilia, I would have to say yes to that, I haven't experienced it personally but Lisa and I if we were to not talk about RL at all would still be in love [19:57] Acuminous Watanabe: Yes Camilla, absolutely! but it is important that you tell your partner that UP FRONT so that they have realistic expectations about your relationship.** [19:57] (GM3): does anyone feel that having a relationship with someone in sl while being married to someone else in rl is a betrayal to the rl spouse? [19:57] Stellar Pleides: I do, (GM3). [19:57] Kenya Karillion: Ditto (GM3) [19:57] iwan Sweetwater: the spouses think so [19:57] Indea Vaher: lol [19:57] Acuminous Watanabe: and yes iwan... a game to "visitors" a landscape to "residents"** [19:57] iwan Sweetwater: emphatically [19:57] Indea Vaher: I think they would too.. [19:57] skyye Anthony: I can see coming to sl for recreation, however, i do have a hard time seeing how ppl develop love relationships here [19:57] Kenya Karillion: married ppl here...what about it [19:57] pet Karu: of course its betrayal - especially when the partner [19:57] skyye Anthony: with families and all [19:58] Kenya Karillion: emotional adultry? [19:58] Acuminous Watanabe: nice analogy Indea... I think I like that one better actually! :))** [19:58] Digitus Camel: Lilian..... as much as I would like to say no to that I cant... it is I think unless they know and dont mind, or even encorage it.... [19:58] Avatar EE: Yeah...Jesus can forgive you..he had that kind of love..he would accept you as you are...accepting someone and youself as you are is that unconditional love. [19:58] Camilla Delvalle: yes elliot, I agreee that it would be difficult. [19:58] Digitus Camel: but mostly yes [19:58] Stellar Pleides: I'm married and I have refused a sexual relationship; I have here for fun & friends. ** [19:58] Indea Vaher: I don't think it's adultry

	[19:58] (GM1): betrayal come from deceit. if you are open with your spouse and accept boundaries, then it is not betrayal [19:58] (GM2): It is not a betrayal....if you are open and honest about your relationship on sl.....If your husand/wife doesnt want you to be on sl....then yes....it is wrong. [19:58] Indea Vaher: not in the traditional sense.. [19:58] Elliott Troglodite: it depends on the relationship. if you are open with each other then it's absolutely not betrayal in the least [19:58] skyye Anthony: i've heard how sl have ruined ppls lives in rl [19:58] Acuminous Watanabe: (GM3), that is a hot one :))** [19:59] (GM3): Hmmmmm [19:59] (GM4): well that is a good point i have learned not to have high expectations then you can be pleasantly surprised rather than disappointed something wasnt fulfulfilled... [19:59] (GM2): it is because they lied from the start [19:59] Indea Vaher: I look at the AVI as a separate entity , like a split personality .. [19:59] (GM3): I really feel that it is a betrayal [19:59] Kenya Karillion: yes that is how I came here CNN ruined marriages due to sl [19:59] Avatar EE: I agree Elliott...depends on the RL relationship of the married people [19:59] skyye Anthony: some people can develop dual personalities on here [19:59] Indea Vaher: agree with Skyye.. [19:59] Stellar Pleides: that's not good for anyone [19:59] (GM2): why do you feel that way (GM3) [19:59] Emerald Ishtari: What we have I guess failed to realize is that love as we discuss is in ALL relationships not just romantic. The topic of "unconditional love" was put on the flor....YES unconditional love does exist and IS taught. Prime example....the love a parent has for their child.** [19:59] Digitus Camel: it has I know two people who have been divorced because of sl and one person who may have killed her self but there is no way of knowing [19:59] Avatar EE: that's a good thought skyye [20:00] Acuminous Watanabe: I think that it is important that each person evaluate their own value system. Most would say that you should behave in SL the way you'd expect your spouse to behave in RL... [20:00] (GM3): I feel that the person behind the avie is real [20:00] Indea Vaher: for some this is like a big dating chat room hoping to connect with rl. [20:00] (GM3): and that the emotions are real [20:00] Elliott Troglodite: it's impossible to betray someone with permission [20:00] Acuminous Watanabe: others say that SL is an opportunity for virtual exploration under the realization that no one person can be EVERYthing to anyone... [20:00] (GM4): ye s (GM3) i agre [20:00] Digitus Camel: I agree (GM3), we are real [20:00] Indea Vaher: for others it is not..the AVI is the begining and end..of SL no crossover. [20:00] (GM3): so to fall in love here while married in rl is to betray the rl spouse [20:00] Avatar EE: yes..SL is a Second LIfe..so, not the same as Real Life...that could produce a dual personality. [20:01] Acuminous Watanabe: it is important that you evaluate what you know in your heart is right for YOU, because ultimately you are the one who must live with the choices you make.** [20:01] (GM4): very true watanabe [20:01] skyye Anthony: i'm not judging, i just struggle with how someone can go THAT far in sl. [20:01] Indea Vaher: The Avi is REAL, but not the same as the person on the keyboard..I guess you have to have a good imagination for that kind of rp [20:01] iwan Sweetwater: true that @ acu [20:01] Cheeto Eclipse: Care, morals, and the basic human conditions don't end at the log in screen or at least they shouldn't.**

[20:01] (GM4): yes again watanabe
[20:01] skyye Anthony: i think sl is great. i love my avi too. i think i'm hot. lol
[20:01] Stellar Pleides: true Cheeto
[20:01] skyye Anthony: and i'm hot in rl too
[20:01] Avatar EE: some people come here for just that!! To have a Second Life..it's alive in a real sense.
[20:01] (GM2): we all love more than one person in real life....there are different types of love.....i feel the only way to betray someone is having rl sex.
[20:01] (GM4): YeSaH! cheeto
[20:01] (GM3): agree acu
[20:02] skyye Anthony: i can see that@Avatar EE
[20:02] (GM4): YeSaH! Avatar EE too
[20:02] Indea Vaher: agree with (GM2)..
[20:02] (GM1): if it's ok with you, but not with your spouse, it's betrayal
[20:02] Avatar EE: Anyone that has had a relationship in SL will find that they will experience the same ups and downs as in RL.
[20:02] (GM3): the emotions of sex here are real, how can you separate the feelings?
[20:02] Indea Vaher: well that depends on the individuals
[20:03] Papi Melson: SL is a great place to put your thought into words,and get feed back from ppl .and then use that information to make RL choices
[20:03] skyye Anthony: @(GM3). the same way you can in rl
[20:03] (GM4): very many thanx all i have enjoyed alls thoughts ....and the great music:)..bye for now...(GM4)<3
[20:03] Indea Vaher: some people can do that...separate feeling. Some cannot.
[20:03] skyye Anthony: you can absolutely seperate ur emotions from sex
[20:03] Acuminous Watanabe: Thanks for coming (GM4) :))**
[20:03] Avatar EE: You every wonder how many broken hearts have been made in SL...
[20:03] (GM3): I think separation of them is not authentic
[20:03] Acuminous Watanabe: Papi, great point**
[20:04] Indea Vaher: ...for some this is an ALTERNATE Reality ,,,emphasis on Alteranate..
[20:04] (GM4): many thanx watanabe:)
[20:04] Papi Melson: TY
[20:04] skyye Anthony: some ppl sep feelings as a defense mechanism to keep from getting hurt
[20:04] iwan Sweetwater: great point Indea
[20:04] skyye Anthony: that happens in rl too
[20:04] Acuminous Watanabe: yes it is Indea**
[20:04] (GM4): thanx niehma an d papi:)
[20:04] Acuminous Watanabe nods @ skyye
[20:04] (GM2): lillan can you get pregnant by having sex on sl?
[20:04] Papi Melson: YW
[20:04] Kenya Karillion: lol (GM2)
[20:04] Digitus Camel: hehehehehe!
[20:04] Indea Vaher: lol
[20:04] skyye Anthony: lol (GM2)
[20:04] Acuminous Watanabe: lol
[20:04] (GM3): no, but relationships can be really ruined
[20:05] Digitus Camel: my friend Greshas did!
[20:05] iwan Sweetwater: is it unhealthy to forget that this is alternate cause I think some do
[20:05] (GM2): (GM3)...think about what i said
[20:05] Camilla Delvalle: But I heard of some way to become pregnant i SL, but I dont know much about it
[20:05] skyye Anthony: see, i think we need to keep things in it's proper perspectives. this (sl) is fantasy, not reality
[20:05] (GM3): iwan that is why I think that it is important to remember that this is a game

	[20:05] Indea Vaher: ...for some it is not an alternate,,for some it is like Match.com or eharmony..and that's ok too [20:05] (GM3-D): Does SL ruin the relationship? or was the relationship already ruined and SL provided an outlet?** [20:05] (GM3): but how you play it can have real life consequences [20:05] iwan Sweetwater: there's a hud that gives women a cycle [20:05] skyye Anthony: this sl is something else. [20:06] Indea Vaher: SL can be many different things to many different people. [20:06] Indea Vaher: single people want to be married.. [20:06] (GM2): The only way you have consequences is if you lie about it [20:06] Indea Vaher: married people want to be single.. [20:06] skyye Anthony: yes@indea. that is the fantasy [20:06] Acuminous Watanabe: Yes skyye, by its very nature SL is fantasy, and opportunity to explore inner self and the inner self of others, as many of us become "residents" for the opportunity of living a life here we may be unable in RL.... [20:06] (GM3): so true Indea [20:06] Indea Vaher: people without kids have kids.l.etc. [20:06] (GM2): That isnt always true indea [20:06] skyye Anthony: ppl w/o children in rl have children in sl [20:06] skyye Anthony: i can see that [20:06] Papi Melson: most ppl in SL come to make friends, and have someone to talk to. be it about problems in RL or just to have a fun time with. either way, we are all here for the same reason ,,,,to make new friends. we don't expect any more than that, but sometimes it becomes more. [20:06] Acuminous Watanabe: and I think that is a good place to begin my closing summary as we have come to the end of our hour together :))... [20:06] pet Karu: great discusion everyone. i look forward to the next meeting. peace to you all :) [20:07] Indea Vaher: not always..because it's different things to different people. [20:07] Acuminous Watanabe: Tonight we have focused of the reality of intimacy and love in this virtual place [20:07] (GM3-D): WOW! It flew by again! [20:07] iwan Sweetwater: yeah this was very interesting [20:07] Acuminous Watanabe: whether it is possible to experience the same feelings here as we do in our RL relationships and interactions... [20:07] Acuminous Watanabe: I think sometimes we forget that feelings are ALWAYS real, our avatars are not capable of living without the human behind the screen... [20:08] Acuminous Watanabe: and often it is those feelings that influence the choices we make, in both worlds... [20:08] Indea Vaher: yes.. [20:08] skyye Anthony: well said @ acu [20:08] Acuminous Watanabe: sometimes those choices are difficult... [20:08] Indea Vaher: very well said. [20:08] Acuminous Watanabe: we hurt as well as feel joy here... [20:09] (GM3): so true Acu [20:09] Acuminous Watanabe: but ultimately when we allow ourselves to be guided by those feelings that we know are right, the end result is a life we can feel good about virtually or in reality :)) [20:09] Acuminous Watanabe: Before you run off, I'd like to make a few brief announcements... [20:09] Acuminous Watanabe: I recently surveyed the group to gauge interest in a 5 week small group titled Spiritual Life as an off spring from some of the disclosures during individual consults and group discussions. [20:09] Acuminous Watanabe: The first group is scheduled to begin this Friday April 3rd at 7PM SLT. It will be conducted in voice and limited to 5-7 members.

	[20:10] Acuminous Watanabe: If you are interested in learning more about this group, Please IM me for information and I'd be happy to send you a note about it. :)) [20:10] Acuminous Watanabe: If you would like to join the SL/RL Relationships Group, please IM and I'd be happy to send you an invite. [20:10] Acuminous Watanabe: If you are maxxed, you may join via the kiosk near the door and your membership will not affect your 25 group limit. [20:11] Acuminous Watanabe: you might also join our webgroup at http://www.slprofiles.com/groups/slrlrelationships [20:11] Acuminous Watanabe: the regular "SL/RL Synthesis Notes" are posted there as well for comment/discussion. [20:11] Acuminous Watanabe: There is a tip sign near the door. If you are so inclined, please feel free to make a donation in support of the academy. [20:11] (GM1): Thank you Acuminous [20:11] Acuminous Watanabe: Your donations help maintain Baobab and events like this one. [20:11] (GM1): this has been very interesting [20:11] Acuminous Watanabe: I'd like to remind you all that the discussions are logged so a transcript is available for members. It will also be posted to the webgroup. [20:12] Acuminous Watanabe: If you would like your comments made anonymous, please IM me and I'd be happy to do so. :)) [20:12] Chan Dejavu: thanks to everyone for sharing and participating!! [20:12] Acuminous Watanabe: I'll be around a bit longer, if any of you have things you'd like to discuss more privately. [20:12] Acuminous Watanabe: If you have an IM in queue, please know that I am coming around as quickly as I can. [20:12] Acuminous Watanabe: Thanks so much for coming. :)) Love you all XOXO

APPENDIX F
SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview Guide/Protocol

_____
___
Interview Protocol Project: Identity and Trust Development within Relationships in Virtual Worlds as Compared to Real World Relationships

Time of interview: Noon SLT

Date: 12-2-09

Place: Snow Valley - Tredi's place

Interviewer: Donna Davis (Avatar: Tredi Felisimo)

Interviewee: EVA

Position of interviewee:

_____ On a scale of 1-10, how stylized was the avatar (including skin, shape, hair)?

(Briefly describe the project and remind the interviewee that the conversation will be recorded)

Thanks again so much for agreeing to participate in this research. A reminder, all information you share with me today will be kept confidential. We'll be communicating in text, if that's ok with you. As such and to avoid confusion, if you'd please conclude an answer with ** so I know you're done, that would be great.

If I think you're still typing, I won't typically interrupt.

Real life gender: __x_____ Male _____ Female

Avatar gender: ____x____ Male _____ Female _____ Gender neutral _____ both (multiple avatars and “skins”)

Real life relationship status: _____ Married __x_____ Single __x____ Separated _____ Divorced _____ in a relationship (other than marriage – if yes, please explain)

Second Life relationship status: _____ Partnered ___x__ Single (in between) _____ in a relationship but not partnered

_40_____ Age SL: 10/12/2006

Education level is high school (graduate?), some college, college degree, advanced degree, professional degree?

_____ On a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 represents the most amount of time spent in virtual worlds or MMORPG's (such as World of Warcraft), how experienced would you consider yourself in virtual worlds?

Questions:

1. Tell me a little about your typical day.

2. (assuming he/she has told me he/she spends time in Second Life….) Tell me about your Second Life.

3. What attracted you to Second Life or any other virtual world and how does it fit in your life (i.e. an entertainment medium, social space, work, research, part of blend of other media consumption, such as TV, movies, etc)?

As you've found yourself spending time in SL, what time did it replace in RL?

4. What are the types of things you like to do in-world?

5. Tell me about the social interactions you have here.

6. How do you feel about revealing your real life information to someone you've met in-world? Talk to me about a time you remember most.

a. When creating your avatar, what type of image did you want to create for your virtual "self"?

7. Tell me about some of the people have you met in Second Life and your observations of them. Also, how you expect them to represent "themselves" either through avi, or in the information they share about themselves. Do you expect them to be "real" in either way?

8. Talk to me about the connections you've made here.

Probe:
a. Have you "partnered" or married anyone in SL?

b. Have you ever met anyone from SL in RL?

c. If so, how closely did they meet what you had expected?

9. What do you find to be the biggest challenges about those relationships? Give me an example.

Probe: Talk to me about trust in this environment.

10. What are the benefits you've experienced from these relationships?

11. How would you say they compare to your real life relationships?

For the sake of exploring interviews in SL, did you find meeting virtually and in text create any challenges or did it impact your responses in a positive or negative way? Was it comfortable and "natural" for you?

Can you think of anything you'd like to add that we didn't cover?

(Thank the participant for their time and reassure him/her that their responses to this or any future interview will be confidential.)

[2009/12/01 18:39] Tredi Felisimo: There will likely be subsequent publications resulting from the research and if you want the publicity, I am happy to cite you by name in my articles (with your permission)
[2009/12/01 18:40] EVA: yes
[2009/12/01 18:41] EVA: i would like to have publicity
[2009/12/01 18:41] Tredi Felisimo: Very well
[2009/12/01 18:41] EVA: :)
[2009/12/01 18:41] EVA: SL is my life
[2009/12/01 18:41] Tredi Felisimo: I watched the film! Was fascinating
[2009/12/01 18:42] EVA: and its part opf it to be known for me
[2009/12/01 18:42] Tredi Felisimo: I will look very forward to having the chance to talk to you in detail about it
[2009/12/01 18:42] EVA: i DJ now if you like to hear it
[2009/12/01 18:43] Tredi Felisimo: I can come for a brief time. Have another obligation shortly
[2009/12/01 18:43] EVA is Online
[2009/12/01 18:46] Tredi Felisimo: thanks for the ride :-)
[2009/12/01 18:47] EVA: yw :)
[2009/12/01 18:47] EVA: its my job in SL
[2009/12/01 18:47] EVA: i entertain people
[2009/12/01 18:48] Tredi Felisimo: very cool
[2009/12/01 18:48] Tredi Felisimo: great dance btw
[2009/12/01 18:48] Tredi Felisimo: thanks!
[2009/12/01 18:50] EVA: :)
[2009/12/01 18:56] Tredi Felisimo: great tunes too

[2009/12/01 18:56] EVA: woot
[2009/12/01 18:56] EVA: i am happy you like
[2009/12/01 18:57] Tredi Felisimo: very much
[2009/12/01 18:58] Tredi Felisimo: I need to go
[2009/12/01 18:58] EVA: ok :)
[2009/12/01 18:58] Tredi Felisimo: Looking forward to noon tomorrow
[2009/12/01 18:58] EVA: see ya tomorrow
[2009/12/01 18:58] EVA: ok:)
[2009/12/01 18:58] Tredi Felisimo: thanks again!
-- Instant message logging enabled --
[12:03] Tredi Felisimo: Greetings! You ready?
[12:03] Tredi Felisimo: Come on over when you are.
[12:04] Tredi Felisimo: Welcome to my home :-)
[12:04] Tredi Felisimo: please have a seat and be comfortable
[12:04] Tredi Felisimo: thanks!
[12:04] Tredi Felisimo: I'm very happy here
[12:04] EVA: heeh you in florida right?
[12:04] Tredi Felisimo: yep
[12:05] Tredi Felisimo: gotta love SL!
[12:05] EVA: you love the snow
[12:05] EVA: i live the beach ahahha
[12:05] Tredi Felisimo: only chance I have at living in snow
[12:05] Tredi Felisimo: hehe
[12:05] EVA: yeah
[12:05] Tredi Felisimo: feels more like the holidays here than in RL for me now
[12:05] EVA: :)
[12:06] Tredi Felisimo: Just a reminder that I will be recording our chat, from private chat
[12:06] EVA: sure
[12:06] Tredi Felisimo: Thanks again so much for agreeing to participate in this research. A reminder, all information you share with me today will be kept confidential. We'll be communicating in text, if that's ok with you. As such and to avoid confusion, if you'd please conclude an answer with ** so I know you're done, that would be great. If I think you're still typing, I won't typically interrupt.
[12:07] EVA: alright **
[12:07] Tredi Felisimo: As we discussed last night, I typically don't ask for any RL identity
[12:07] Tredi Felisimo: and all we discuss would be confidential
[12:07] Tredi Felisimo: I do have a few RL demographic questions I'd like to ask, first, if that's ok?
[12:08] EVA: yes please
[12:08] Tredi Felisimo: thanks
[12:08] Tredi Felisimo: I know from your video that not only is your avi male, but you are in RL also.
[12:08] Tredi Felisimo: :-)
[12:08] EVA: oh i will coyp it too

[12:08] EVA: btw
[12:08] EVA: :)
[12:08] Tredi Felisimo: np
[12:08] EVA: and probably use it as well
[12:08] EVA: :)
[12:08] EVA: but only my text not yours
[12:09] Tredi Felisimo: np
[12:09] EVA: ok :)
[12:09] EVA: **
[12:09] Tredi Felisimo: can you tell me in RL if you're married, single, separated, divorced, or in a relationship with a significant other?
[12:10] EVA: seperated single
[12:10] Tredi Felisimo: and in SL? partnered, single, in a relationship but not partnered?
[12:10] EVA: in between
[12:11] EVA: i have soem girls who like me a lot
[12:11] EVA: but i look for RL relationship they aim virtual love
[12:11] Tredi Felisimo: that's very interesting. I will come back to that, ok?
[12:12] Tredi Felisimo: and your age in RL?
[12:12] EVA: 40
[12:12] EVA: and 2 days
[12:12] EVA: :)
[12:12] Tredi Felisimo: Happy belated birthday!!
[12:12] Tredi Felisimo: Hope it was joyful!
[12:12] EVA: awww thank you
[12:12] EVA: yes we ahd fun
[12:12] EVA: had
[12:12] Tredi Felisimo: great
[12:13] Tredi Felisimo: your education level.... is it high school (graduate?), some college, college degree, advanced degree, professional degree?
[12:13] EVA: i attended the best university of my country
[12:13] EVA: and had to stop my stuidies i ran out of money
[12:14] EVA: so not degree on high level
[12:14] Tredi Felisimo: You're in Germany, yes?
[12:14] EVA: zurich
[12:14] Tredi Felisimo: ahhh
[12:14] Tredi Felisimo: ok
[12:14] Tredi Felisimo: Although I think I know the answer to this, can you tell me, On a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 represents the most amount of time spent in virtual worlds or MMORPG's (such as World of Warcraft), how experienced would you consider yourself in virtual worlds?
[12:15] EVA: 7
[12:15] EVA: but not WOW
[12:15] Tredi Felisimo: was thinking you might say that :-)
[12:15] Tredi Felisimo: Sl and others?
[12:15] EVA: just SL

[12:15] EVA: i dont like the guided worlds
[12:15] EVA: if i do guided games i play PS3
[12:16] EVA: single player
[12:16] EVA: maybe a double player game
[12:16] EVA: not interested in mulit playser games
[12:16] EVA: i see the risk of beeing griefed and hacked as to big
[12:16] Tredi Felisimo: interesting
[12:16] EVA: as they competition make agressiv
[12:17] Tredi Felisimo: hmmmm
[12:17] Tredi Felisimo: No fear of that in SL?
[12:17] EVA: no
[12:17] EVA: in SL i just mute
[12:17] EVA: griefing become totally pointless
[12:17] Tredi Felisimo: I didn't realize it was such a problem in the MMORPGs
[12:17] Tredi Felisimo: very true!
[12:17] Tredi Felisimo: no mute button on the games, eh?
[12:17] EVA: you have mute button
[12:18] EVA: but you were engaged before
[12:18] Tredi Felisimo: I don't play them either, so I have no idea how they work
[12:18] EVA: in a competition so you share a lot
[12:18] EVA: without beeing freinds
[12:18] Tredi Felisimo: I see
[12:18] EVA: not in SL
[12:18] Tredi Felisimo: right
[12:18] Tredi Felisimo: hard to share what we WANT to sometimes!
[12:19] Tredi Felisimo: OK. Can you tell me a little about your typical day, in general? (I'll have plenty of specifics to ask later)
[12:19] EVA: i live in 2 diffent states
[12:19] EVA: with kids
[12:19] EVA: and without
[12:20] EVA: i see my kids every 2nd weekend and 7 weeks a year
[12:20] EVA: for holidays
[12:20] EVA: if they here i live diffrent
[12:20] EVA: of i typical day without to babys
[12:20] EVA: ok a typical day without the kids
[12:20] EVA: i get up at 8 9 am
[12:20] Tredi Felisimo: yes
[12:20] EVA: login
[12:21] EVA: stay there till 2 3 am
[12:21] EVA: maybe i go shopping at 4pm
[12:21] Tredi Felisimo: So, almost 18 hours a day you spend in SL?
[12:21] Tredi Felisimo: typically?
[12:21] EVA: sometimes i meet Rl friends
[12:21] EVA: every 2 weeks maybe
[12:21] EVA: yes
[12:22] EVA: i live here

[12:22] Tredi Felisimo: You mentioned that last night, and I learned about that from the video link you sent me.
[12:22] Tredi Felisimo: Can you tell me what attracted you to Second Life and how does it fit in your life (i.e. an entertainment medium, social space, work, research, part of blend of other media consumption, such as TV, movies, etc)?
[12:23] Tredi Felisimo: I know you say it IS you life. So you do all those things here?
[12:23] EVA: yes
[12:23] Tredi Felisimo: make your living here as well as your social life
[12:23] EVA: i am an artist
[12:23] Tredi Felisimo: How do you express your art in SL?
[12:23] EVA: i choose to be in virtual worlds
[12:23] EVA: as this has not been done before
[12:24] EVA: and its what artist do
[12:24] EVA: first of all i support people here
[12:24] EVA: i see my self as a supporter
[12:24] Tredi Felisimo: that's a great thing
[12:25] Tredi Felisimo: how do you support them?
[12:25] EVA: there is almost nothing i cannot do in SL
[12:25] EVA: i odnt do sculptires
[12:25] EVA: thats about it
[12:25] EVA: all the rest i have the skills
[12:26] EVA: so i can answer questions
[12:26] Tredi Felisimo: so you design things? clothes, houses, buildings, environments?
[12:26] EVA: no
[12:26] EVA: i dont sell
[12:26] EVA: also its not very interesting for me to copy Rl in SL
[12:26] Tredi Felisimo: How do you determine who you help?
[12:27] Tredi Felisimo: Are you part of a mentoring program?
[12:27] EVA: no
[12:27] EVA: people cros my way
[12:27] EVA: cross
[12:27] EVA: i only help to nice people
[12:27] EVA: who can make it to be my friend
[12:27] Tredi Felisimo: You've made many friends in SL, I would imagine, that way
[12:27] EVA: i odnt want to help everybody
[12:28] Tredi Felisimo: that could be overwhelming!
[12:28] EVA: yes
[12:28] EVA: this i learned in SL
[12:28] EVA: i must be protective
[12:28] EVA: of my self
[12:28] Tredi Felisimo: emotionally?
[12:28] EVA: so i spend time with people who like me
[12:28] EVA: and dont abuse me
[12:29] EVA: respect
[12:29] EVA: i demand
[12:29] Tredi Felisimo: you've experienced difficult people, it sounds like?

[12:29] EVA: not only emotionally also time consuming
[12:29] Tredi Felisimo: ahhh yes
[12:30] EVA: all kinds of rip off
[12:30] Tredi Felisimo: I know that problem well
[12:30] EVA: yes people who are really nice
[12:30] EVA: but they never let oyu go
[12:30] EVA: and involve you in things
[12:30] Tredi Felisimo: why do you think that is?
[12:30] EVA: its a power game
[12:30] EVA: they pay you 5000L
[12:30] EVA: for a script
[12:31] EVA: and trewat you like a employee
[12:31] EVA: for days!
[12:31] EVA: lol
[12:31] Tredi Felisimo: yikes!
[12:31] EVA: i say no
[12:31] Tredi Felisimo: you prefer to give your time out of friendship, rather than for Linden?
[12:32] EVA: i need lindens
[12:32] Tredi Felisimo: sure
[12:32] EVA: but yes
[12:32] EVA: i dont do slavery
[12:32] Tredi Felisimo: you work enough here that you can earn a living?
[12:32] EVA: no
[12:32] EVA: i make about 50$ a month
[12:32] Tredi Felisimo: in 18 hours a day
[12:33] EVA: yes
[12:33] EVA: i live here
[12:33] EVA: like an creature
[12:33] Tredi Felisimo: How are you able to do that, if I may be so bold as to ask?
[12:33] EVA: i am on disability
[12:33] Tredi Felisimo: ahhh
[12:33] EVA: insurance
[12:34] Tredi Felisimo: so your life here, is purely social, and intellectual (from a creative perspective)?
[12:34] EVA: yes
[12:34] EVA: i study it
[12:35] Tredi Felisimo: can you tell me about the social interactions you have here?
[12:35] EVA: i collect knowledge
[12:35] Tredi Felisimo: it's a very rich environment for that EVA!
[12:35] EVA: yes :)
[12:35] EVA: maybe some day people come and ask
[12:35] EVA: i do this longterm
[12:35] EVA: so i dont want to waste time on making buissness here
[12:36] EVA: i listen a lot
[12:36] EVA: and discuss

[12:36] EVA: about doffrent cultures
[12:36] Tredi Felisimo: tell me about the people you share that with
[12:36] EVA: morals
[12:37] EVA: i hve 30 online now
[12:37] EVA: i delete peopel i cannot remember
[12:37] Tredi Felisimo: that's an interesting point
[12:37] EVA: of the 30 on now
[12:37] EVA: new are about 10
[12:37] Tredi Felisimo: myself included
[12:37] Tredi Felisimo: :-)
[12:37] EVA: 20 i know very good
[12:38] EVA: and another 300 ofline
[12:38] Tredi Felisimo: WOW!
[12:38] Tredi Felisimo: and you remember them all!?!?!?
[12:38] EVA: yes
[12:38] EVA: i collect trust
[12:38] Tredi Felisimo: that's quite a collection!
[12:38] EVA: people say
[12:38] EVA: in Rl you cannot have more than 5 good freinds
[12:39] EVA: you simply dont have the time
[12:39] EVA: in SL you can
[12:39] Tredi Felisimo: Do you share your RL identity and life information with them?
[12:39] EVA: yes
[12:40] Tredi Felisimo: I recall you talking about your avatar. When you created your virtual look, what were the important considerations for you?
[12:40] EVA: beauty
[12:40] EVA: similarity to my Rl 20
[12:40] EVA: age of 20
[12:40] Tredi Felisimo: I think of myself also as a younger thinner version of me
[12:41] Tredi Felisimo: but, it's me
[12:41] EVA: yes
[12:41] EVA: i dont see much change since 20
[12:41] EVA: the big steps you take till 20
[12:41] EVA: then you just learn
[12:41] EVA: become wise
[12:41] EVA: but not much change anymore
[12:41] Tredi Felisimo: Do you expect that of others, that they represent their "real" selves?
[12:42] EVA: no
[12:42] EVA: but it impress me more than a goofy
[12:42] Tredi Felisimo: I think we represent ourselves both visually and through the words we share (what we reveal about ourselves)
[12:42] Tredi Felisimo: a furry is obviously not a "real" representation
[12:43] EVA: furrys usually like dogs
[12:43] Tredi Felisimo: really?
[12:43] EVA: i naver had a dog

[12:43] EVA: yes
[12:43] EVA: i think so
[12:43] EVA: they are dog owners
[12:43] EVA: most i met
[12:44] EVA: i cannot understand this relationship
[12:44] EVA: beween man and dog
[12:44] Tredi Felisimo: I'd like to go back to your 300 friends and this notion of friendship in SL. Can you tell me about some of the connections you've made here?
[12:44] EVA: there are groups
[12:44] EVA: girls romance attraction
[12:45] EVA: artists
[12:45] EVA: musicians
[12:45] EVA: i know more females
[12:45] EVA: than males
[12:45] Tredi Felisimo: you consider these deep relationships?
[12:46] EVA: with artists
[12:46] EVA: i make art
[12:46] EVA: we look at each others work
[12:46] EVA: and do our own some times
[12:46] EVA: and support
[12:46] EVA: each others
[12:46] EVA: such realtionshop grow strong
[12:47] EVA: musicians is diffrent
[12:47] Tredi Felisimo: How do you express your art. Do you have it on display?
[12:47] EVA: we just go to each others music
[12:47] EVA: and dont talk much
[12:47] EVA: we just listen
[12:47] Tredi Felisimo: your music, is the DJ work you do? mixing?
[12:47] EVA: but also we all look for new aays
[12:48] EVA: yes DJing
[12:48] EVA: mostly
[12:48] EVA: i am not into live music
[12:48] EVA: some
[12:48] EVA: i like
[12:48] EVA: about 4
[12:48] Tredi Felisimo: those strong relationships you mention. are those friends, or romances?
[12:48] Tredi Felisimo: or both?
[12:49] EVA: its time
[12:49] EVA: we share
[12:49] EVA: adn also the freedom
[12:49] EVA: we share
[12:49] EVA: Sl is a connection you dont have to keep up
[12:49] EVA: as you would like in job
[12:49] EVA: its something you do on free will
[12:49] EVA: so if you cannot let go

[12:50] EVA: its like "love"
[12:50] EVA: Sl is a connection you dont have to keep alive
[12:50] EVA: idf you know waht i mean
[12:50] EVA: lol
[12:50] EVA: i face my limits of english
[12:50] Tredi Felisimo: I'm thinking about that
[12:50] Tredi Felisimo: np
[12:50] Tredi Felisimo: you're doing great
[12:51] Tredi Felisimo: so, like frienships, and boyfriends/girlfriends, they come and go in RL, they come and go in SL?
[12:52] Tredi Felisimo: do you think they're any more or less "real" or "deep" in SL than they are in RL?
[12:52] EVA: its diffrent
[12:52] EVA: for me it is a 3rd way of communication
[12:52] EVA: 1st way
[12:53] EVA: the public way
[12:53] EVA: the public behaviour you show
[12:53] EVA: in job
[12:53] EVA: in a bar
[12:53] EVA: 2nd
[12:53] EVA: the private behaviour
[12:53] EVA: when you communicate to your husband
[12:53] EVA: to your kids
[12:53] EVA: to your best freidn at hom
[12:53] EVA: ion living room
[12:53] EVA: 3rd
[12:53] EVA: and new
[12:54] EVA: for human kind
[12:54] EVA: SL
[12:54] EVA: its diffrent
[12:54] EVA: both are in a alone state
[12:54] Tredi Felisimo: that's a fascinating perspective EVA
[12:54] EVA: usually you dont talk in such mood
[12:54] EVA: you know what i mean
[12:54] Tredi Felisimo: totally
[12:54] EVA: usually you are alone
[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: right
[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: we sit alone in RL now, but we are connected and communicating with each other
[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: across the world
[12:55] Tredi Felisimo: and right in front of each other, virtually
[12:56] Tredi Felisimo: have you ever met anyone from SL in RL?
[12:56] EVA: yes this is why i dont like voice
[12:56] Tredi Felisimo: ??
[12:56] EVA: voice does not keep up this privacy
[12:56] Tredi Felisimo: ahhh

[12:57] EVA: but i still can see you
[12:57] EVA: and read you
[12:57] EVA: ok next
[12:57] EVA: yes i met a lot
[12:57] Tredi Felisimo: there are many different opinions of that... the privacy of text
[12:57] Tredi Felisimo: what we do and don't reveal in text
[12:57] Tredi Felisimo: how do you feel about that? do you trust it any more or less than voice?
[12:57] Tredi Felisimo: or face to face?
[12:58] EVA: i like it better
[12:58] EVA: noo
[12:58] EVA: its diffrent
[12:58] EVA: wait
[12:58] EVA: i usually text
[12:58] EVA: sometimes we phone
[12:58] EVA: why not its fun
[12:59] Tredi Felisimo: :-))
[12:59] EVA: but i could not walk around with mic on always
[12:59] Tredi Felisimo: true
[12:59] EVA: if i like the people
[12:59] EVA: we do camming
[12:59] EVA: but maybe every 5th time we meet
[12:59] EVA: what i like the most is face to face
[13:00] EVA: m,eet Rl
[13:00] EVA: is most fun
[13:00] EVA: but expensive
[13:00] Tredi Felisimo: when you voice or cam or meet with them in RL, has it ever changed what you expected of them?
[13:00] EVA: no
[13:00] Tredi Felisimo: changed the image you'd developed from knowing them in SL
[13:00] Tredi Felisimo: no
[13:00] Tredi Felisimo: ok
[13:00] EVA: no
[13:01] EVA: people i talk to
[13:01] EVA: i know quite good
[13:01] EVA: and i can read a lot
[13:01] EVA: also the prims they collect
[13:01] EVA: tell me a lot
[13:01] Tredi Felisimo: hmmmmm
[13:01] Tredi Felisimo wonders how many prims I've collected and what that says about me.....
[13:01] Tredi Felisimo: heheh
[13:01] EVA: hehe
[13:01] EVA: well
[13:02] EVA: i odnt think this much
[13:02] EVA: its not like hand reading

[13:02] EVA: its just a intuition i get
[13:02] EVA: i feel ok or not
[13:02] Tredi Felisimo: I hear that with some frequency
[13:02] Tredi Felisimo: you feel you have to have a stronger intuition here?
[13:03] EVA: yes
[13:03] EVA: it does not take me long to leave the place
[13:03] Tredi Felisimo: you mentioned you collect trust... is that part of it?
[13:03] EVA: yes
[13:03] EVA: i odnt waste time on bad wibes
[13:03] Tredi Felisimo: You also mentioned that you have women who want to love you virtually
[13:04] Tredi Felisimo: but you seek a RL connection?
[13:04] Tredi Felisimo: can you elaborate on that?
[13:04] EVA: well
[13:04] EVA: not easy
[13:04] EVA: lol
[13:05] EVA: RL coneection is very difficult
[13:05] EVA: as i must stay here
[13:05] EVA: have no job
[13:05] EVA: not much fame here
[13:05] EVA: my offer is not very tempting for women
[13:05] EVA: but they like my ways
[13:06] EVA: so they tend to occupy me
[13:06] EVA: and bitch other women
[13:06] EVA: :)
[13:06] Tredi Felisimo: lol
[13:06] Tredi Felisimo: cat fights, eh?
[13:06] EVA: yes
[13:06] EVA: but i want it RL
[13:06] Tredi Felisimo: like teenagers sometimes I think
[13:06] EVA: but they cannot do it
[13:06] EVA: some are married
[13:07] EVA: most just live to far away
[13:07] EVA: or they have kids them slefs
[13:07] EVA: etc
[13:07] EVA: not easy to move to a guys polace
[13:07] EVA: i understand totally
[13:07] EVA: but
[13:07] Tredi Felisimo: do you think you'd change your SL if you had someone there?
[13:07] EVA: like this
[13:07] EVA: i will not be thier "husband"
[13:07] Tredi Felisimo: you have never partnered?
[13:07] EVA: i did many times
[13:08] EVA: thy all told me they will move to my place
[13:08] EVA: but they all found someone else inRL
[13:08] EVA: :)

[13:08] Tredi Felisimo: your place in RL?
[13:08] EVA: yes
[13:08] EVA: well 4 times
[13:08] EVA: it was it
[13:08] EVA: lol
[13:08] EVA: in 3 years
[13:08] EVA: 2 found somone else
[13:08] EVA: 1 was married
[13:09] EVA: and 1 stayed with her BF
[13:09] EVA: now i dont do it anymore
[13:09] Tredi Felisimo: What do you think is the biggest challenge in these relationships?
[13:09] Tredi Felisimo: in either establishing or maintaining them
[13:09] EVA: well if someons here
[13:09] EVA: i do all for her
[13:10] EVA: whatever she need
[13:10] EVA: i odnt need much
[13:10] EVA: as i have no RL at all
[13:10] EVA: she has no RL at all
[13:10] EVA: if she move to my place
[13:10] EVA: i just have my kids
[13:10] EVA: i will show her my town
[13:10] EVA: sounds romantic
[13:10] EVA: but i am a empty sheet
[13:10] EVA: we coudl write a new stroy on it
[13:11] EVA: whatever it is
[13:11] Tredi Felisimo: that sounds romantic too, EVA
[13:11] EVA: but i also face the truth
[13:12] EVA: its unlikly it will happen
[13:12] EVA: but io like it like this
[13:12] EVA: i can do a lot in here
[13:12] Tredi Felisimo: about choices, yes?
[13:12] EVA: and peole like my work
[13:12] EVA: they have fun
[13:12] EVA: when i DJ
[13:12] EVA: or if i show them my art
[13:12] Tredi Felisimo: I saw that last night!
[13:13] Tredi Felisimo: that they were enjoying your DJing
[13:13] Tredi Felisimo: what do you think are the benefits of the relationships you've created here
[13:13] EVA: knowlegde
[13:13] Tredi Felisimo: especially as you choose to LIVE here
[13:13] EVA: i can teach my kids
[13:14] EVA: i am pretty sure i will profuit of it some day
[13:14] EVA: noone has this experience as i have

[13:14] Tredi Felisimo: what kinds of things have you learned that you think has been important to share with your children?
[13:14] EVA: i learn a lot about USA
[13:14] EVA: as i joined in in 06
[13:15] EVA: there were not many europeans here
[13:15] Tredi Felisimo: it's changed the way you look at us?
[13:15] EVA: a lot
[13:15] Tredi Felisimo wonders if that's a good thing or a bad thing
[13:15] EVA: people in USA have things we dont have
[13:15] EVA: i like much more
[13:15] EVA: also we have things you dont have
[13:16] Tredi Felisimo: (can start with HISTORY!)
[13:16] Tredi Felisimo: lol
[13:16] EVA: lol
[13:16] EVA: basically
[13:16] EVA: us people are more helpful
[13:16] EVA: nicer
[13:16] Tredi Felisimo: more so than you expected?
[13:16] EVA: i did not know
[13:16] Tredi Felisimo: ahh
[13:17] EVA: i did not expect anything
[13:17] EVA: europeans they are not this trustful to others
[13:17] Tredi Felisimo: I'm glad you found positive encounters with Americans!
[13:17] Tredi Felisimo: really?
[13:17] EVA: noo
[13:17] Tredi Felisimo: that's interesting
[13:17] EVA: us people
[13:17] EVA: also have selfconfidence
[13:17] EVA: this is the base
[13:18] EVA: for this
[13:18] EVA: they stand on both feet
[13:18] EVA: and challange people
[13:18] Tredi Felisimo: such an interesting perspective
[13:18] EVA: europeans
[13:18] EVA: they hide
[13:18] Tredi Felisimo: huh
[13:18] EVA: we avopid each others
[13:18] EVA: usually
[13:19] Tredi Felisimo: yet you all live so close!
[13:19] Tredi Felisimo: :-)
[13:19] EVA: but we also not so proud as yu are
[13:19] Tredi Felisimo: such a pity
[13:19] EVA: even the weakest i met
[13:19] EVA: have this
[13:19] EVA: basic grounded feeling
[13:20] Tredi Felisimo: very interesting

[13:20] Tredi Felisimo: Can you tell me how your relationships in SL compare to your relationships in RL?
[13:20] Tredi Felisimo: clearly there are MORE of them!
[13:21] Tredi Felisimo: and you said, many are very deep
[13:21] EVA: well deep
[13:21] EVA: i know detalis
[13:22] EVA: some people tell me things theynevr told anyone
[13:22] EVA: not even their püarents
[13:22] EVA: noone
[13:22] EVA: like a girl told me
[13:22] EVA: she hear voices
[13:22] EVA: noone knows it
[13:22] EVA: she is scared to tell anyone
[13:22] Tredi Felisimo: what do you think it is different about SL that gave her the courage or freedom to tell you?
[13:23] Tredi Felisimo: when she can't tell anyone in RL?
[13:23] EVA: i have no chance to tell anyone
[13:23] EVA: so she can talk about it
[13:23] EVA: i can tell her its not unusual
[13:23] EVA: 10% of the population hear voices
[13:23] EVA: she realx
[13:24] EVA: such htings
[13:24] EVA: dont happen RL
[13:24] Tredi Felisimo: 10%!?! never heard that before!
[13:24] EVA: yes
[13:24] EVA: 10
[13:24] Tredi Felisimo: you're "safe" to her
[13:24] EVA: 40% HAVE PSYCHOSIS IN THEIR LIFETIME
[13:24] Tredi Felisimo: yes, that I was aware of
[13:24] EVA: as singel event
[13:24] EVA: 10% are chronical
[13:25] EVA: ie maore than 5 times in life
[13:25] EVA: many think they hear god
[13:25] EVA: btw
[13:26] Tredi Felisimo: Was just thinking that! EVA, I've pretty well covered the questions I had for you. Can you think of anything you'd like to add that we didn't cover?
[13:26] EVA: well about the deepness of relationships
[13:26] Tredi Felisimo: yes?
[13:26] EVA: in SL you see the soul
[13:27] EVA: in Rl you see the body
[13:27] EVA: and smell
[13:27] EVA: i fyou can see the soul RL
[13:27] EVA: you probably marry
[13:27] EVA: lol
[13:27] Tredi Felisimo: agree!!!

[13:28] Tredi Felisimo: pretty amazing, this place
[13:28] EVA: but often you dont get this far and marry anyway
[13:28] Tredi Felisimo: interesting dicotomy
[13:28] EVA: many women i meet
[13:28] EVA: want to be with my soul
[13:28] EVA: but not my body my money
[13:29] EVA: they have a a man
[13:29] EVA: who work
[13:29] Tredi Felisimo: we see each other more deeply when we can't see each other..... hypothetically
[13:29] EVA: but he has not interest in their soul
[13:29] EVA: so theay fill this gap
[13:29] EVA: also
[13:29] EVA: yes
[13:30] EVA: we see much more
[13:30] EVA: also we write
[13:30] EVA: we try to make short sentence
[13:30] EVA: we can talk same time
[13:30] EVA: is not rude at all
[13:30] EVA: and the written stuff you can reread
[13:30] Tredi Felisimo: such great points!
[13:31] Tredi Felisimo: really changes the way we communicate, doesn't it?
[13:31] EVA: yes
[13:31] EVA: its a new way
[13:31] EVA: this is the main reason why i choose as an artist to be here
[13:31] EVA: i must be part of it
[13:31] Tredi Felisimo: I agree with you totally, btw
[13:31] EVA: as this form of communication is like the wheel fro human kind
[13:32] EVA: it will change the world form
[13:32] Tredi Felisimo: I think you are right
[13:32] EVA: one way mass communication as the nazi did sucessful for first time
[13:32] EVA: to a networked way of communication
[13:33] Tredi Felisimo: is a unique blend of interpersonal and mass communication
[13:33] EVA: of mass communication
[13:33] Tredi Felisimo: I agree with you
[13:33] EVA: rigth now
[13:34] EVA: left wing polititian talk to right wing
[13:34] EVA: i hope soon we talk about the issues ourselfs
[13:34] Tredi Felisimo: I usually close by asking if meeting virtually and in text created any challenges or impacted the way you'd respond in a positive or negative way, but clearly you are quite at home in this environment
[13:34] EVA: in billions of chats
[13:34] Tredi Felisimo: twitter did that to an extent too EVA
[13:34] Tredi Felisimo: with the elections in Iran
[13:35] Tredi Felisimo: exposed reality
[13:35] Tredi Felisimo: from the point of the masses, not the gatekeepers

[13:35] EVA: yes peole will just know
[13:35] EVA: and noone knows why they know
[13:36] EVA: it scares police
[13:36] EVA: but they will get used to it
[13:36] Tredi Felisimo: sounds like a form of anarchy
[13:36] Tredi Felisimo: :-)
[13:36] EVA: it will help to carry criminals
[13:36] EVA: if such a person IM me
[13:36] EVA: maybe i can calm her down
[13:37] EVA: maybe i can
[13:37] EVA: maybe you
[13:37] EVA: or someone else
[13:37] Tredi Felisimo: carry criminals?
[13:37] EVA: its a law of random
[13:37] EVA: care for them
[13:37] EVA: $teach them
[13:37] Tredi Felisimo: ahhh
[13:37] Tredi Felisimo: I understand
[13:37] EVA: maybe they stop
[13:37] Tredi Felisimo: yes!
[13:37] Tredi Felisimo: yes
[13:37] EVA: better than oput them to jail
[13:37] Tredi Felisimo: incredible potential
[13:38] EVA: but they have to trust people
[13:38] EVA: should not interfere to much
[13:39] Tredi Felisimo: EVA, I have another obligation I must attend to. Thank you again SO very much for your time and participation. Please feel free to IM or send a notecard (safer as my IMs get capped) if you think of something you want to add later
[13:39] Tredi Felisimo: or, feel free to IM and we can continue at a later time!
[13:39] EVA: can you send me the protocol of this chat?
[13:39] Tredi Felisimo: certainly
[13:40] EVA: tnx was fun
[13:41] EVA: i wish you the best for your work
[13:41] Tredi Felisimo: My pleasure! Thank YOU!
[13:41] Tredi Felisimo: thanks
[13:41] Tredi Felisimo: and likewise!

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Donna is a woman of many hats. Her first and favorite job is the one that lasts a lifetime, as the mother of three wonderful (now adult) children. Although she is always wearing that hat, she also worked as the host and Senior Producer of Family Album Radio, a two-minute daily radio module based on current family social science research from 2004 to 2010. The award-winning program is produced by the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences and Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Extension at the University of Florida and is distributed through the National Public Radio (NPR) system as well as via the Internet. She holds a Bachelor of Science in journalism from the University of Florida, a Master of Science in family, youth and community sciences at the University, and a Doctor of Philosophy in mass communications, studying the media effects of 3-D immersive worlds and how they impact both virtual and real human relations. She has presented her research at Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, at the European Public Relations Education and Research Association in Italy and in Romania (with expectation to present in Finland in 2010).

She has been working for more than 20 years in the field of communications including teaching as an adjunct instructor in the College of Journalism and Communications at UF since 1982. She will be joining the faculty of the University of Oregon as a visiting assistant professor in September, 2010. She was also the first working mother to serve as State President of the Florida Public Relations Association in the organization's 53-year history.

Donna's voice has also been heard in a number of surprising places. In her hometown of Gainesville, Florida, she was the female voice talent for program

promotion, underwriting credits and fund drives for WUFT-TV/FM for several years. She also voices numerous commercial advertisements and (if you still own a computer old enough to have Microsoft® XP) her voice is that mysterious female speaking to you through your computer through the interactive training feature as well as on several other Microsoft® tutorials developed by LearnIt Corp. She has also co-hosted a weekly financial call-in radio program, "Dollars and Sense with Jeff and Donna Davis" with her husband, Jeff, the financial planner and owner of Falcon Financial Management on WKSY-FM in Gainesville since 1999.